

CHARLESTON BUDDHIST FELLOWSHIP

# The Life Of the Buddha



*Compiled from Various Sources by*  
Allan R. Bomhard



Intermediate Series



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CHARLESTON BUDDHIST FELLOWSHIP  
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upon the original teachings (*aggavāda*) of the Buddha.

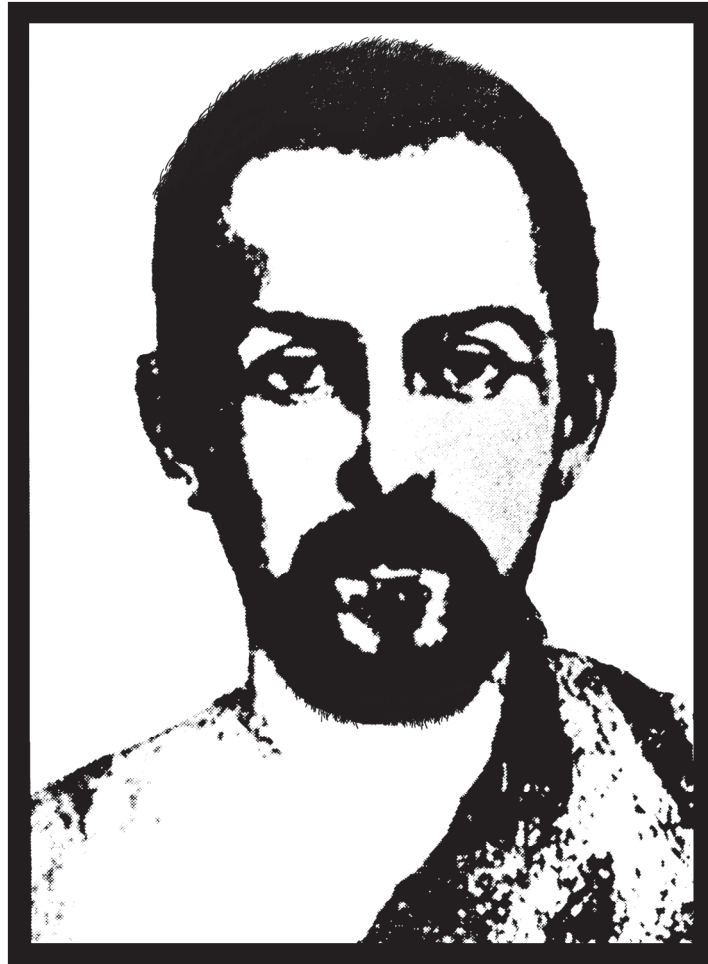
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THE BUDDHA, THE ENLIGHTENED ONE.

This image, which is based upon ancient Indian oral and visual tradition, is thought best to represent the *Buddha* as He actually appeared.

Source: John Stevens, *Lust for Enlightenment: Buddhism and Sex* (Boston, MA, and London: Shambhala Publications [1990], p. 14).





# 1

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## The Buddha: From Birth to Renunciation

*“Monks, there is a unique Being, an extraordinary person, who has appeared in the world for the welfare of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare, and happiness of celestial beings (devas) and humans. Who is that unique Being? It is the Tathāgata, the Exalted, Fully Enlightened One. This, indeed, is that unique Being.*

*“Monks, there is a Being who has appeared in the world who is the only one of His kind, without a peer, without a counterpart, incomparable, unequalled, matchless, unrivalled — the best of humans. Who is that unique Being? It is the Tathāgata, the Exalted, Fully Enlightened One. This, indeed, is that unique Being.*

*“Monks, the manifestation of a unique Being is the manifestation of great vision, of great light, of great radiance; it is the manifestation of the six things unsurpassed;<sup>1</sup> the realization of the four analytical knowledges;<sup>2</sup> the penetration of the various elements, of the diversity of elements; it is the realization of the fruit of knowledge and liberation; the realization of the fruits of Stream-Entry, of Once-Returning, of Non-Returning, and of Arahatsip.<sup>3</sup> Who is that unique Being? It is the*

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<sup>1</sup> The “six things unsurpassed” (*cha anuttariyā*) are explained in the *Anguttara Nikāya* 6:130: (1) the unsurpassed sight (that is, the sight of a *Buddha* or His disciples); (2) the unsurpassed hearing (that is, the hearing of the *Dhamma* from a *Buddha* or His disciples); (3) the unsurpassed gain (that is, the gain of faith in a *Buddha* or His disciples); (4) the unsurpassed training (that is, the training in the higher morality, the higher mind, and the higher wisdom as taught by a *Buddha* and His disciples); (5) the unsurpassed service (that is, service to a *Buddha* or His disciples); and (6) the unsurpassed recollection (that is, the recollection of a *Buddha* or His disciples).

<sup>2</sup> The “four analytical knowledges” (*catasso paṭisambhidā*) are the analytical knowledges of meaning, doctrine, language, and ingenuity.

<sup>3</sup> The “fruits (*phala*) of stream-entry”, etc. may be explained as follows: Between the states of delusion, bondage, and suffering and that of complete liberation (*vimokkha*) lie the paths and fruits of attainment, marked by the progressive elimination of ten fetters (*saṃyojana*). One who has put an end to the first three fetters is known as a Stream-Winner (*Sotāpanna*). When, in addition, the next two fetters are weakened, one becomes a Once-Returner (*Sakadāgāmi*). When all of the first five fetters, which are known as the grosser fetters, are completely destroyed, one becomes a Non-Returner (*Anāgāmi*). When all ten fetters are destroyed, one attains the state of *Arahat*.

*Tathāgata, the Exalted, Fully Enlightened One. This, indeed, is that unique Being.*"<sup>4</sup>

## Introduction<sup>5</sup>

History has produced many great figures, but none, in this present cycle of time, as impressive and memorable as Siddhattha Gotama, the Sākyan prince who became the world's greatest spiritual guide. He was unique as a personality and unique as a teacher. There were countless Enlightened Ones before Him, and there will be more, so long as cyclic existence (*samsāra*) endures, but He is the only one of whom we have actual historical knowledge, and His life has been a source of wonder and inspiration for more than 2,600 years. It continues to be so to this day.

Every Buddhist is familiar with the miraculous stories connected with Prince Siddhattha's birth, early manhood, and later life as the *Buddha*. The traditional tales handed down from generation to generation of Buddhists are full of marvels, some of which are difficult for the modern mind to accept as literally true. In this, Buddhism is no different from other creeds. All of them have their mythological accretions — the legends that time and the devotion of the faithful have woven about the lives of their founders. But, whereas in most other religions, the supernatural events are an essential part of the faith, to be held as proof that the founder was a divine personage, an incarnation of God, or a prophet specially singled out to be God's spokesman on earth, in Buddhism, they have no importance whatsoever, because the *Buddha* did not claim to be any of these things. If one so chooses, the stories may be taken literally, or they may be regarded as fiction. The uniqueness of the *Buddha* does not rest upon miracles or myths, but upon the established, unembellished facts of His life, and, above all, on the realizable truth of His Teaching.

The unembellished facts of His life alone are more than enough to move us to awe and veneration. They confront us with something outside normal experience, a challenge to the world's accepted values and to some of its most cherished goals.

The world of the time in which Prince Siddhattha lived was not so different from our own. Then, as today, men were inclined to worship power; they strove for wealth and position, reveled in luxury when they could, and lamented their poverty when they could not. They loved and hated, they quarreled and cheated, they were cowards at times and heroes at others, they were mean and noble by turns, just as they are now. They placed great value on the pleasures of the senses and did their best to ignore the tragedies

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<sup>4</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya*, part I, XIII, 1, 5, 6; I 22—23; Bhikkhu Bodhi (ed.), *In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pāli Canon* (Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications [2005]), p. 51.

<sup>5</sup> This section, along with other parts of this chapter, are adapted from "The Buddha — A Unique Teacher," included in *Dimensions of Buddhist Thought: Collected Essays* by Francis Story (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society [1985]), pp. 3—12. Parts are also adapted from Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, *The Life of the Buddha According to the Pāli Canon* (Seattle, WA: PBS Pariyatti Editions [3rd ed. 1992]) and from H[ammalawa] Saddhatissa, *The Life of the Buddha* (London, Boston, MA, and Sydney: Unwin Paperbacks [1976]).

around them, turning a blind eye to sickness and pain, and, above all, trying to forget that death awaits us all — the rich and the powerful, the poor and the downtrodden, and ordinary men and women alike.

## Birth

In the sixth century BCE, in the foothills of the Himalayas, near the present-day border between India and Nepal, there was a small but prosperous kingdom ruled by an aristocratic clan known as the Sākya. The capital of the Sākya kingdom was called Kapilavatthu,<sup>6</sup> and the surrounding land was thickly dotted with smaller towns and villages. To the south of this kingdom lay the country of Kosala and, beyond that, the kingdom of Magadha. To the east lay the land of Koliya.

Ten lunar months after conception, the queen and her retinue left Kapilavatthu to visit her parents in Koliya. On the way, she passed through Lumbinī,<sup>7</sup> a park that was owned jointly by the people of both lands. There, she gave birth to a noble prince in a curtained enclosure in the park on the full-moon day of May<sup>8</sup> in the year 623 BCE.<sup>9</sup> The purported site of His birth, now called Rummidei, lies within the territory of Nepal. This newly born child was destined to become the greatest religious teacher the world had ever seen.

His father<sup>10</sup> was King Suddhodana<sup>11</sup>, and His mother was Queen Mahā Māyā. Inasmuch as the beloved mother died seven days after His birth, Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī,<sup>12</sup> her younger sister, who was also married to the King, raised the prince, entrusting her own son, Nanda, to the care of nurses.

<sup>6</sup> The site of Kapilavatthu (Sanskrit *Kapilavastu*) has been identified with Bhuila (Bhulya) in the Basti district, three miles from the Bengal and N. W. Railway station of Babuan.

<sup>7</sup> A pillar, erected at this sacred spot by King Asoka to commemorate the event, still stands to this day.

<sup>8</sup> Corresponding to Pāli *Vesākha* (Sanskrit *Vaisākha*) and Sinhalese *Vesak*.

<sup>9</sup> Unlike the Christian Era, the Buddhist Era is reckoned from the death of the *Buddha*, which occurred in 543 BCE (in His 80th year), and not from His birth. It should be noted that opinions differ on the exact date of the birth of the *Buddha*. The date given here is from Nārada Mahāthera, *The Buddha and His Teachings* (Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Missionary Society [fourth edition, 1988]), p. 1. H[ammalawa] Saddhatissa, *The Life of the Buddha* (London, Boston, MA, and Sydney: Unwin Paperbacks [1976]), p. 13, gives the date as 560 BCE. The consensus is that the *Buddha* lived in northern India sometime between the sixth and fourth centuries BCE (cf. the article on the life of the *Buddha* in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

<sup>10</sup> Gotama (Sanskrit *Gautama*) is the family name, and Sākya (Sanskrit *Śākya*) is the name of the clan to which the *Buddha* belonged.

Tradition holds that the sons of King Okkāka of the Mahāsammata line were exiled through the plotting of their step-mother. These princes, in the course of their wanderings, arrived at the foothills of the Himalayas. Here, they met the sage Kapila, on whose advice and after whom, they founded the city of Kapilavatthu, the site of Kapila. King Okkāka, hearing of the enterprise, exclaimed: *Sākya vata bho rājakumārā* “capable indeed are the noble princes.” Hence, the clan and the kingdom they founded were known by the name Sākya.

The Sākya kingdom was situated in Southern Nepal and extended over much of modern Oudh.

<sup>11</sup> Sanskrit *Suddhodana*.

<sup>12</sup> Sanskrit *Mahā Prajāpatī Gautamī*.

Great were the rejoicings of the people over the birth of this illustrious prince. An ascetic of high spiritual attainments, named Asita, also known as Kāladevala, was particularly pleased to hear this happy news, and, being a tutor of the King, visited the palace to see the royal babe. Upon arriving, he sat down and asked: “Where is the child? Show Him to me.” The King, who felt honored by this unexpected visit, carried the child up to him in order to make the child pay due reverence, but, to the surprise of all, the child’s legs turned and rested on the matted locks of the ascetic. Instantly, the ascetic rose from his seat and, foreseeing with his supernormal vision the child’s future greatness, saluted Him with clasped hands.<sup>13</sup> The royal father did likewise.

The great ascetic smiled at first and then was sad. Questioned regarding his mixed feelings, he answered that he smiled because the prince would eventually become a *Buddha*, an Enlightened One, and he was sad because he would not be able to benefit from the superior wisdom of the Enlightened One owing to his prior death and rebirth in a Formless Plane (*arūpaloka*).<sup>14</sup>

### Naming Ceremony

On the fifth day after the prince’s birth, He was named Siddhattha, which means “wish fulfilled.” His family name was Gotama.<sup>15</sup>

In accordance with ancient Indian custom, 108 learned Brahmins were invited to the palace for the naming ceremony. Among them, there were eight distinguished men who were specialists in interpreting body marks. Examining the characteristic marks of the child, seven of them raised two fingers each, indicative of two alternative possibilities, and said that He would either become a Universal Monarch or a *Buddha*. But the youngest, Koṇḍañña,<sup>16</sup> who excelled the others in wisdom, noticing that the hair on the forehead turned to the right, raised only one finger and convincingly declared that the prince would definitely retire from the world and become a *Buddha*.

### Plowing Festival

A very remarkable incident took place in Prince Siddhattha’s childhood. It was an unprecedented spiritual experience that later, during His search for the Truth, served as the key to His Enlightenment.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> On Asita’s advice, his nephew Nālaka renounced the world, and, when the prince, as expected, attained Buddhahood, he heard His teachings and became an *Arahat*. See Nālaka Sutta, *Sutta Nipāta*.

<sup>14</sup> *Arūpalokas* are immaterial planes (*lokas*) where those who have developed the *arūpajjhānas* (immaterial absorptions) are born.

<sup>15</sup> Sanskrit *Siddhārtha Gautama*.

<sup>16</sup> Hearing that Prince Siddhattha renounced the world, this Koṇḍañña and four sons of the other seven Brahmins retired from the world and joined Him as His followers. These were the first five Chief Disciples of the *Buddha*.

<sup>17</sup> See *Majjhima Nikāya*, part I, Mahāsaccaka Sutta, no. 36.

To promote agriculture, King Suddhodana arranged for a plowing festival. It was, indeed, a festive occasion for all, as both nobles and commoners, decked in their best attire, participated in the ceremony. On the appointed day, the King, accompanied by his courtiers, went to the field, taking with him the young prince<sup>18</sup> together with the nurses. Placing the child on a screened and canopied couch under the cool shade of a rose-apple tree to be watched by the nurses, the King participated in the plowing festival. When the festival was at the height of gaiety, the nurses stole away from the prince's presence to catch a glimpse of the festivities.

In striking contrast to the mirth and merriment of the festival, it was all calm and quiet under the rose-apple tree. All the conditions conducive to quiet meditation being there, the pensive child, young in years but old in wisdom, sat cross-legged and seized the opportunity to commence that all-important practice of intense concentration on the breath — on inhalations and exhalations — which gained for Him, then and there, that one-pointedness of mind known as *samādhi* (concentration), and He thus developed the first *jhāna*<sup>19</sup> (meditative absorption). The child's nurses, who had abandoned their precious charge to enjoy themselves at the festival, suddenly remembering their duty, hastened to the child and were amazed to see Him sitting cross-legged plunged deep in meditation. When the King heard of it, he hurried to the spot and, seeing the child in meditation position, saluted Him, saying: "This, dear child, is my second obeisance."

## Education

As a royal child, Prince Siddhattha must have received an education that befitted a prince. This would have included a wide range of subjects, including languages and mathematics. As a scion of the Warrior (*Khattiya*<sup>20</sup>) Caste, He would also have received special training in the art of warfare and sports such as wrestling and archery. He is reported to have been a tall, strong, and handsome youth and was noted for His good manners, kindness, and compassion for living things.

<sup>18</sup> Prince Siddhattha was seven years old when this event took place.

<sup>19</sup> *Jhāna* (Sanskrit *dhyāna*) is the name for a highly developed state of mental concentration (*samādhi*). According to the *suttanta* method, there are eight such states: four fine-material absorptions (*rūpajjhāna*) and four immaterial absorptions (*arūpajjhāna*). According to the *Abhidhamma* method, on the other hand, there are nine such states.

<sup>20</sup> At the time of the *Buddha*, Indian society was divided into four fundamental social classes, or castes (Pāli *vaṇṇa*, Sanskrit *varṇa*). The first was the Priestly, or Brahmin Caste (Pāli and Sanskrit *Brāhmaṇa*), which included priests, philosophers, scholars, and religious leaders. Next was the Warrior Caste (Pāli *Khattiya*, Sanskrit *Kṣatriya*), which included the rulers, generals, officers, and civil authorities. Then came the Merchant Caste (Pāli *Vessa*, Sanskrit *Vaiśya*), which also included farmers. Finally, there was the lowest caste (Pāli *Sudda*, Sanskrit *Śūdra*), which included the workers and servants. Each caste had its own duties and responsibilities. For example, the duty of the *Khattiya* caste was the protection of the community. In those days, the lines of demarcation between each caste were variable and not clearly defined. The complexity and rigidity of the modern caste system was unknown. Cf. Christmas Humphreys, *A Popular Dictionary of Buddhism* (London: Curzon Press [1984]), pp. 111—112. See also, *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion* (Boston, MA: Shambhala [1989]), pp. 44, 186, and 400.

## Married Life

At the early age of sixteen, Prince Siddhattha married His beautiful cousin Princess Yasodharā,<sup>21</sup> who was of equal age. For nearly thirteen years after His happy marriage, He led a luxurious life, blissfully ignorant of the vicissitudes of life outside the palace gates. Of His luxurious life as prince, He states:

*“I was delicate, excessively delicate. In my father’s dwelling, three lotus ponds were made purposely for me. Blue lotuses blossomed in one, red in another, and white in another. I used no sandalwood that was not of Kāsi.<sup>22</sup> My turban, tunic, dress, and cloak were all from Kāsi.*

*“Night and day, a white parasol was held over me so that I might not be touched by heat or cold, dust, leaves, or dew.*

*“There were three palaces built for me — one for the cold season, one for the hot season, and one for the rainy season. During the four rainy months, I lived in the palace for the rainy season without ever coming down from it, entertained all the while by female musicians. Just as, in the houses of others, food from the husks of rice, together with sour gruel, is given to the slaves and workmen, even so, in my father’s house, food with rice and meat was given to the slaves and workmen.”<sup>23</sup>*

With the march of time, truth gradually dawned on Him. His contemplative nature and boundless compassion did not permit Him to spend His time in the mere enjoyment of the fleeting pleasures of the royal palace. He knew no personal grief, but He felt a deep pity for the suffering of humanity. Amidst comfort and prosperity, He realized the universality of sorrow.

## Renunciation

Surrounded by every conceivable luxury, the young prince was protected by His anxious father, King Suddhodana, from even the slightest exposure to ugliness and suffering. His days were spent in delightful gardens, from which every withered leaf had been deliberately removed. The melodious singing of birds and the splash of fountains soothed His royal ears; and, where the green shade of cool trees shielded Him and His companions from the noonday heat, the air was filled with the languorous scent of jasmine and frangipani. And at night, in the lofty hall of the palace, where great fans of peacock feathers gently stirred the air, He would watch the dancing girls weaving sinuous patterns in the soft glow of perfumed lamps until, lulled by drowsy music, He would drift

<sup>21</sup> Sanskrit *Yaśodharā*. She was also known as Bhaddakaccānā, Bimbā, and Rāhulamātā. Note: According to the *Chronicle of the Buddhas*, Bhaddakaccānā was her name before marriage.

<sup>22</sup> A province in Central India noted for its silk. Modern Benares (Vārāṇasi; Kāsi) was its capital.

<sup>23</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya*, part I, 3:38.



into the peaceful sleep of youth. The dancers would, one by one, stretch themselves out on the carpeted floor and relax their tired limbs; the fingers of the sitar player would slip from the strings, and all would be quiet as the flickering lamps burned out.

And so it was from day to day — a light and carefree existence. Why, then, was the young prince not happy? Could it be that He was troubled by the dark knowledge from a life before this? Did He suspect that the world outside the palace walls was not the carefree, exquisite, and gentle world He knew — the world that had been artificially created for Him by His father? Or did He have the unconscious knowledge that His life was already dedicated to something other than this, and that a supreme, self-chosen task lay before Him?

We do not know. But a time came when, at last, four sights met His eyes that changed the whole course of His life. This turning point came when He was twenty-nine years old. All the diversions provided by His father did not prevent the prince from feeling bored and restless. Hence, it came to pass that, one day, He summoned His favorite charioteer and personal attendant Channa and asked to be taken for a ride in the countryside, outside the palace walls. Channa chose four fine horses and harnessed them to a magnificent chariot. In the meantime, King Suddhodana took every precaution to ensure that nothing would mar the excursion. However, in spite of the efforts taken by the King, the prince and Channa had not gone far before they came upon a hunched-up, tired-looking old man standing in the roadway.

“What is that?” He asked Channa, bringing the chariot to a stop. “It looks like a man, but his hair is all white, he has no teeth, his cheeks are sunken, his skin is dry and wrinkled, and his eyes are bleary. Look at his bent back, his ribs are protruding, and his thin crooked arms and legs seem as though they can hardly support his wretched frame, so that he has to lean on a stick. What kind of man is that?”

“That”, replied Channa, apparently making little effort to hide the truth, “is an old man. He is someone who has been living for a long time, perhaps sixty, seventy, or even eighty or more years, so that his body is old and worn out. It is nothing to be dismayed about, since it is inevitable. No one escapes old age.”

“Do you mean to say that all of us will become like that, that we will all become old and worn out?” asked Siddhattha. “That Yasodharā, and you, and all my youthful companions, and even myself as well, will one day look like that?”

“Yes, my Lord,” answered Channa. “It is everyone’s lot.”

Prince Siddhattha was so upset that He could not go on with the ride. Instead, He turned the chariot around and went back to the palace, deep in thought, too troubled to speak. When the King saw Channa and his son returning so soon after they had set out on their excursion, he asked Channa what had happened, and, when he heard the reason, he cried out in despair: “Now you have destroyed me!” But the King was not one to give up so easily. In an effort to remove the memory of the old man from Prince Siddhattha’s mind, he ordered special dramas and amusements to be provided. He also doubled the guard around the palace grounds and ordered everyone to keep quiet and act as though nothing unusual had happened.

Undeterred, Siddhattha decided to go for a chariot ride with Channa outside the palace walls a second time, and, on this occasion, they encountered a man who was ill. He was so weak that he could not stand up. Instead, he was rolling and writhing on the ground. His eyes were bloodshot, his mouth was frothing, and he groaned and beat his chest in agony. As before, Channa explained the situation, and, once more, Siddhattha was upset. “Is this a rare thing, or does it happen to everybody?” he asked.

“Everybody is liable to get ill, my Lord,” answered Channa. But then he added a note of reassurance: “However, if a man is careful about what he eats and drinks, and if he keeps clean, gets proper rest, and has plenty of exercise, he is more likely to remain healthy. There is no need to worry.”

“No need to worry!” exclaimed the prince. “First, I saw the horror of decay and old age, and now it seems that everyone is liable to find himself in such a wretched state as this man!”

As before, they cut short their excursion and returned to the palace. Again, Siddhattha remained deep in thought about what he had seen.

A third time, Siddhattha and Channa went on an excursion outside the palace walls, and, this time, they came upon a funeral procession. The mourners were wailing and beating their breasts, while, in contrast, the corpse that they were carrying lay still and lifeless like a mannequin. Channa replied to Siddhattha’s inevitable questions and then went on: “Death, my Lord, is the end of life. When life ceases, that is death. One’s body dies when it can go on no longer because of old age and decay, or else it dies because of disease. Breathing stops, and the heart no longer beats. However, there is nothing strange about it. It is as common as birth, for everyone who lives must sooner or later die. There is nothing anyone can do about it, since it is the nature of things, so there is no need to worry about it. Just hope for a long life.”

Siddhattha thought deeply about this as well as the sights He had seen on His two previous excursions, and He came to realize that these unpleasant facts, which had been hidden from Him for so long due to the misguided efforts of His father, represented the true nature of existence — suffering (*dukkha*). Then, He began to wonder whether there might not be some way out of this dilemma, some means of escape. “Must everyone I love, and myself as well, simply stand by helplessly while old age, sickness, and death run their course?” He asked Himself as He and Channa drove back to the palace.

Subsequently, Siddhattha and Channa went beyond the palace walls a fourth and last time, and, as before, an unexpected sight awaited Siddhattha by the roadside. But this time, it was not a sight of despair. It was a man with a shaven head, simply dressed in a patched yellow robe, standing barefoot and holding an alms-bowl in his hand. His face bore a calm, thoughtful expression, and his gaze was directed downward, as though he was a person at peace, engrossed in pleasant thoughts. Halting the horses, Siddhattha asked Channa: “What is this? Is it a man or, indeed, a deity who stands there so calm and aloof, as if the joys and sorrows of the world do not touch him?”

Channa replied: “That, my Lord, is an ascetic. He is someone who has seen how old age, sickness, and death afflict all beings, and he has renounced the world to seek a solution to the enigma of life. He has no home but seeks shelter in caves and woods,



begging enough food for one frugal meal a day and living a life of discipline and simplicity, striving to be pure in word, deed, and thought and seeking liberation from the suffering of the world through meditation. He travels from place to place and tries to tell people how to live a good life and find happiness.”

The artificial world of pleasure and beauty that His father had created for Him was shattered. It could not hold Him any longer. Realizing the worthlessness of sensory pleasures, so highly prized by the worldling (*puthujjana*), and appreciating the value of renunciation (*nekkhamma*), in which the wise (*paṇḍita*) seek delight, He decided to leave the life He had known to search for Truth (*sacca*) and Eternal Peace (*nibbāna*). “I must become like that ascetic. I, too, shall renounce this world and seek liberation from suffering.” He later described His decision to a gathering of monks thus:

“Monks, before my Enlightenment, while I was still only an unenlightened Bodhisatta,<sup>24</sup> I, too, being myself subject to birth, sought that which was also subject to birth; being myself subject to aging, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement, I sought that which was also subject to aging, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement. Then, I considered thus: ‘Why, being myself subject to birth, do I seek that which is also subject to birth? Why, being myself subject to aging, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement, do I seek that which is also subject to aging, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement? Suppose that, being myself subject to birth, I seek the unborn supreme security from bondage, nibbāna. Suppose that, being myself subject to aging, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement, having understood the danger in that which is subject to aging, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement, I seek the unaging, unailing, deathless, sorrowless, and undefiled supreme security from bondage, nibbāna’.”<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Sanskrit *Bodhisattva*, “one who is aspiring to attain Buddhahood.” A *Bodhisatta* is a being destined to Buddhahood, a future *Buddha*. According to the traditional belief, a *Bodhisatta*, before reaching his last birth as a *Buddha* on this earth, is living in the Tusita heaven, the heaven of bliss.

In the Pāli Canon and Commentaries, the designation “*Bodhisatta*” is given only to Prince Siddhattha before His Enlightenment and to His former existences. The *Buddha* Himself uses this term when speaking of His life prior to Enlightenment. Bodhisattahood is neither mentioned nor recommended as an ideal higher than or alternative to Arahantship, nor is there any record in the Pāli scriptures of a disciple declaring it to be his aspiration. Cf. Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines* (4th revised edition; Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society [1980]), p. 41.

The so-called “*Bodhisattva* Ideal” plays an enormous role in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Furthermore, Mahāyāna Buddhism has created a whole host of mythical *Bodhisattvas*. Mahāyāna Buddhism also places great importance on the performance of rites and rituals, and it has developed secret rites (*tantra*) that had no place in the original Teachings of the *Buddha*. For details on the development of the “*Bodhisattva* Ideal”, cf. especially Bhikkhu Nyanatusita himi (ed.), *The Bodhisattva Ideal: Essays on the Emergence of the Mahāyāna* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society [2013]).

<sup>25</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, part I, Ariyapariyesanā Sutta, no. 26; Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, *The Life of the Buddha According to the Pāli Canon* (Seattle, WA: PBS Pariyatti Editions [3rd ed. 1992]), p. 10; Bhikkhu Bodhi (ed.), *In the Buddha’s Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pāli Canon* (Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications [2005]), pp. 55—56.

In another discourse, He described His decision as follows:

*“Here, Aggivessana,<sup>26</sup> before my Enlightenment, while I was still only an unenlightened Bodhisatta, I thought: ‘Household life is crowded and dusty; life gone forth is wide open. It is not easy, while living at home, to lead the Holy Life, utterly perfect and pure as a polished shell. Suppose I shave off my hair and beard, put on the saffron-colored robe, and go forth from the home life into homelessness’.”<sup>27</sup>*

When, after much deliberation, this final decision was taken, the news of the birth of a son was conveyed to Him. Contrary to expectations, He was not overjoyed but regarded His first and only offspring as an impediment. An ordinary father would have welcomed the joyful tidings, but Prince Siddhattha, the extraordinary father that He was, exclaimed: “An impediment (*rāhu*) has been born; a fetter has arisen.” The infant son was accordingly named Rāhula<sup>28</sup> by his grandfather, King Suddhodana.

The palace was no longer a congenial place to the contemplative Prince Siddhattha. Neither His charming young wife nor His lovable infant son could deter Him from changing the decision He had taken to renounce the world. He was destined to play an infinitely more important and beneficial role than that of a dutiful husband and father or even as a king of kings. The allurements of the palace were no longer cherished objects of delight to Him. The time was ripe to depart. Privately, His father, King Suddhodana, sensed the discontent in Siddhattha and resigned himself to losing his son.

Late into the night, when everyone else in the palace was sound asleep, the prince arose from His bed and dressed. He woke Channa and ordered him to saddle the horse Kanthaka. Then, one last time, He went to the suite of apartments occupied by the princess. Opening the door of the chamber, He stood at the threshold and cast a gentle glance on His wife and child, who were fast asleep. Great was His compassion for the two dear ones at this parting moment. Greater was His compassion for suffering humanity. He was not worried about the future worldly happiness and comfort of His wife and child, since they had everything in abundance and were well protected. It was not that He loved them the less, but He loved humanity more.

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<sup>26</sup> Saccaka, the son of Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta, also known as Mahāvīra. Mahāvīra, who was a contemporary of the *Buddha*, established Jainism as a religious community, though the beginnings of Jainism go back much further than Mahāvīra. Here, Saccaka is being referred to by his clan name, Aggivessana.

<sup>27</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, part I, Mahāsaccaka Sutta, no. 36; Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, *The Life of the Buddha According to the Pāḷi Canon* (Seattle, WA: PBS Pariyatti Editions [3rd ed. 1992]), p. 10; Bhikkhu Bodhi (ed.), *In the Buddha’s Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pāḷi Canon* (Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications [2005]), p. 59.

<sup>28</sup> Literally, “bound or seized (*la*) by a fetter (*rāhu*).” Rāhula was seven years old when the *Buddha* returned to Kapilavatthu. It was then that his mother, Yasodharā, sent Rāhula to his father to ask for his inheritance, and the *Buddha* responded by having him ordained as a monk. This distressed the *Buddha*’s father, King Suddhodana, and he explained to the *Buddha* the great pain that he had felt when the young prince had renounced the world. He asked, therefore, that, in the future, a son be ordained only with the permission of his parents. The *Buddha* agreed and made this one of the rules of the monastic order.

Leaving all behind, He stole away, with a light heart, from the palace at midnight and rode into the dark, accompanied only by His loyal charioteer. Alone and penniless, He set out in search of Truth and Peace. Thus did He renounce the world. It was not the renunciation of an old man who has had his fill of worldly life. It was not the renunciation of a poor man who had nothing to leave behind. It was the renunciation of a prince in the prime of manhood and in the plenitude of wealth and prosperity — a renunciation unparalleled in history.

He journeyed far and, crossing the river Anomā, rested on its banks. Here, He shaved His hair and beard and, handing over His garments and jewelry to Channa with instructions to return to the palace, assumed the simple saffron-colored garb of an ascetic and began to live a life of voluntary poverty. Prince Siddhattha was twenty-nine years old when He set out on this historic journey.

The Ascetic Gotama, as He was thenceforth called, who once lived in the lap of luxury, now became a penniless wanderer, living on what little the charity-minded gave of their own accord.

As an ascetic, He went south, where centers of learning and spiritual discipline flourished, and arrived, in due course, at Rājagaha, the capital of the Magadha kingdom. Bimbisāra, the king of Magadha, was impressed by the handsome appearance and the serene personality of this strange ascetic and visited Him when He was seated at the foot of a hill. The king, after he discovered that the ascetic was a former prince, offered Him every comfort and suggested that He should stay with him to share his kingdom. Gotama, however, rejected the king's offer, saying that He had no need of those things that He had renounced and that He was in search of truth. Bimbisāra then requested that, when Gotama obtained Enlightenment, He return to visit Rājagaha again, to which Gotama agreed.

He had no permanent abode. A shady tree or a lonely cave sheltered Him by day or night. Bare-footed and bare-headed, He walked in the scorching sun and in the piercing cold. With no possessions to call His own, but an alms-bowl to collect His food and robes just sufficient to cover His body, He concentrated all His energies on the quest for Truth.

## Search

Thus, as a wanderer, a seeker after what is good, searching for the unsurpassed Peace, He approached Āḷāra Kālāma, a distinguished ascetic, and said: "I desire, friend Kālāma, to lead the Holy Life in this dispensation of yours." Thereupon, Āḷāra Kālāma told Him: "You may stay with me, O Venerable One. This teaching is of such sort that an intelligent man may realize, in a short time, by his own intuitive wisdom, his master's doctrine and abide in the attainment thereof."

Before long, He learned the doctrine taught by Āḷāra Kālāma, but it brought Him no closer to the realization of the highest Truth.

Then, the thought came to Him: When Ālāra Kālāma declared: “Having myself realized the doctrine by intuitive knowledge, I ‘abide in the attainment thereof,’ it could not have been a mere profession of faith; surely, Ālāra Kālāma lives having understood and perceived this doctrine.”

Thereupon, He went to him and said: “How far, friend Kālāma, does this doctrine extend which you yourself have, with intuitive wisdom, realized and attained?”

Upon hearing this, Ālāra Kālāma made known to Him the Realm of Nothingness (*ākāṅkhaṇṇāyatana*),<sup>29</sup> an advanced stage of concentration.

Then, it occurred to Him: “Not only in Ālāra Kālāma are to be found faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. I, too, possess these virtues. How now if I strive to realize that doctrine that Ālāra Kālāma says that he himself has realized and abides in the attainment thereof!”

So, before long, He realized, by His own intuitive wisdom, that doctrine and attained to that state, but it brought Him no realization of the highest Truth.

Then, He approached Ālāra Kālāma and said: “Is this the full extent, friend Kālāma, of this doctrine of which you say you yourself have realized by your wisdom and abide in the attainment thereof?”

“But, I also, friend, have realized thus far in this doctrine and abide in the attainment thereof.”

The unenvious teacher was delighted to hear of the success of his accomplished pupil. He honored Him by placing Him on a perfect level with himself and admiringly said:

*“Happy, friend, are we, extremely happy, in that we look upon such a venerable fellow ascetic like you! That same doctrine which I myself have realized by my wisdom and proclaim, having attained thereunto, have you yourself realized by your wisdom and abide in the attainment thereof; and that doctrine which you yourself have realized by your wisdom and abide in the attainment thereof, that I myself have realized by my wisdom and proclaim, having attained thereunto. Thus, the doctrine which I know, you also know; and the doctrine which you know, that I know also. As I am, so are you; as you are, so am I. Come, friend, let both of us together lead the company of ascetics.”*<sup>30</sup>

The Ascetic Gotama was not satisfied with a discipline and a doctrine that only led to a high degree of mental concentration but did not lead to “disgust, detachment, cessation (of suffering), tranquility, insight, enlightenment, and *nibbāna*.” Nor was He anxious to lead a company of ascetics, even with the cooperation of another generous teacher of equal spiritual attainment, without first perfecting Himself. It was, He felt, a

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<sup>29</sup> The third *arūpajjhāna*.

<sup>30</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, part I, Ariyapariyesanā Sutta, no. 26; Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, *The Life of the Buddha According to the Pāli Canon* (Seattle, WA: PBS Pariyatti Editions [3rd ed. 1992]), pp. 13—14; Bhikkhu Bodhi (ed.), *In the Buddha’s Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pāli Canon* (Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications [2005]), p. 57.

case of the blind leading the blind. Dissatisfied with his teaching, He politely took His leave from Ālāra Kālāma.

In those happy days, when there were no political disturbances, the intellectuals of India were preoccupied with the study and exposition of various philosophical and religious systems. All facilities were provided for those more spiritually inclined to lead holy lives in solitude in accordance with their temperaments, and most of these teachers had large followings of disciples. Consequently, it was not difficult for the Ascetic Gotama to find another religious teacher who was more advanced than the former.

On this occasion, He approached one Uddaka Rāmaputta and expressed His desire to lead the Holy Life in his dispensation. He was readily admitted as a pupil.

Before long, the intelligent Ascetic Gotama mastered the doctrine and attained the final stage of concentration, the Realm of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception (*n'eva saññā n'āsaññāyatana*),<sup>31</sup> revealed by this teacher. This was the highest stage in worldly concentration, when consciousness becomes so subtle and refined that it cannot be said that a consciousness either exists or does not exist. Ancient Indian sages could not proceed further in spiritual development.

The noble teacher was delighted to hear of the success of his illustrious royal pupil. Unlike His former teacher, the present one honored Him by inviting Him to take full charge of all the disciples as their teacher. He said: “Happy, friend, are we, yea, extremely happy, in that we see such a venerable fellow ascetic as you! The doctrine that Rāma knows, you know; the doctrine that you know, Rāma knows. As is Rāma, so are you; as you are, so is Rāma. Come, friend, henceforth, you shall lead this company of ascetics!”

Still, the Ascetic Gotama felt that His quest for the highest Truth had not been achieved. He had gained complete mastery of His mind, but His ultimate goal was far ahead. He was seeking for the Highest, for *nibbāna* — the complete cessation of suffering, the total eradication of all forms of craving. Dissatisfied with this doctrine too, He bid farewell to Uddaka Rāmaputta and departed, no longer content to remain there.

He realized that His spiritual aspirations were far higher than those under whom He had chosen to study. He realized that there was no one capable enough to teach Him what He yearned for — the highest Truth. He also realized that the highest Truth is to be found within oneself and ceased to seek external help.

There was another path He had not yet tried. It was a fearful and dangerous one; nevertheless, He was determined to follow it. Living in the depths of the forest or in cemeteries, or wandering from place to place homeless and without shelter, there were ascetics who subjected themselves to the most extreme physical torture. Their belief was that, by fasting and mortification of the flesh, they could release themselves from earthly bondage; they hoped that, by dying as to the body, they could obtain immortality in the spirit. To them, the body was a prison that kept them from union with the “divine soul”, and their aim was to destroy its hold while they yet lived. Among them were some who

<sup>31</sup> The fourth *arūpajjhāna*.

wanted power, for it was also believed that, by protracted austerities, so much spiritual strength could be accumulated that even the gods would be forced to obey their will.

The Ascetic Gotama did not want that. He longed only for the end of suffering, and perhaps this was the way to find it. He left the ashrams, as He had left the royal palace, and took to the life of a forest-dwelling ascetic. For six years, He followed that path with unflagging resolution. Without shelter, His body exposed to the burning summer sun, the drenching rains of the monsoon season, and the cold of winter nights, He lived from day to day, from year to year. Gradually, He reduced His food until He was subsisting on a handful each time of bean soup or lentil soup or vetch soup or pea soup, and His body became a skeleton covered only by parched, weathered skin. Other ascetics, men who had been practicing austerities less rigorously, marveled at His zeal, no less than at His powers of endurance. It seemed that only by a miracle could that emaciated body still harbor life. ■

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# 2

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## His Struggle for Enlightenment

*“It is easy to do things that are bad and unbeneficial to oneself, but it is extremely difficult, indeed, to do things that are beneficial and good.”<sup>32</sup>*

### Struggle

Meeting with disappointment, but not discouraged, the Ascetic Gotama, seeking for the incomparable Peace, the highest Truth, wandered through the district of Magadha and arrived, in due course, at Uruvelā, the market town of Senāni. There, He found a lovely spot of ground, a charming forest grove, with a clear-flowing river with pleasant, sandy banks, and, nearby, was a village where He could obtain His food. Then, He thought thus:

*“This is an agreeable piece of ground, this is a delightful grove, with a clear-flowing river with pleasant, sandy banks and, nearby, is a village where I can obtain my food. This will serve for the striving of a clansman intent on striving.”<sup>33</sup>*

The place was congenial for His meditation. The atmosphere was peaceful. The surroundings were pleasant. The scenery was charming. Alone, He resolved to settle down there to achieve His desired goal.

Hearing of His renunciation, Koṇḍañña, the youngest Brahmin who had predicted Prince Siddhattha’s future at the naming ceremony, and four sons of the other sages — Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahānāma, and Assaji — also renounced the world and joined His company.

In olden days in India, great importance was attached to rites, ceremonies, penances, and sacrifices. It was then a popular belief that no deliverance could be obtained unless one leads a life of strict asceticism. Accordingly, for six long years, the Ascetic Gotama made a superhuman effort, practicing all forms of the severest austerity. His delicate body was nearly reduced to a skeleton. The more He tormented His body, the further His goal receded from Him.

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<sup>32</sup> *Dhammapada*, XII, The Self, verse 163.

<sup>33</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, part I, Ariyapariyesanā Sutta, no. 26.

How strenuously He struggled, the various methods He employed, and how He eventually succeeded are graphically described in various *suttas*. His preliminary effort is described in the Mahāsaccaka Sutta<sup>34</sup> thus:

*“Then, the following thought occurred to me: ‘What if I were to clench my teeth, press my tongue against the palate, and, with [moral] thoughts, hold down, subdue, and destroy my [immoral] thoughts!’ So I clenched my teeth, pressed my tongue against the palate, and strove to hold down, subdue, and destroy my [immoral] thoughts with [moral] thoughts. As I struggled thus, perspiration streamed forth from my armpits. Like a strong man who might seize a weaker man by head or shoulders and hold him down, force him down, and bring him into submission, even so did I struggle. Strenuous and indomitable was my energy. My mindfulness was established and unperturbed. My body was, however, fatigued and was not calmed as a result of that painful endeavor, being overpowered by exertion. Even though such painful sensations arose in me, they did not at all affect my mind.*

*“Then, I thought to myself: ‘What if I were to practice the non-breathing austerity.’ Accordingly, I stopped the in-breaths and out-breaths through my mouth and nostrils. As I stopped the in-breaths and out-breaths from mouth and nostrils, the air coming out of my ears created an exceedingly loud noise. Just as a blacksmith’s bellows make an exceedingly great noise when blown, so, too, there was a loud noise coming out of my ears when I stopped breathing. Nevertheless, my energy was strenuous and indomitable. Established and unperturbed was my mindfulness. Yet, my body was fatigued and was not calmed as a result of this painful endeavor, being overpowered by exertion. Even though such painful sensations arose in me, they did not at all affect my mind.*

*“Then, I thought to myself: ‘What if I were to practice the non-breathing austerity further.’ Accordingly, I stopped the in-breaths and out-breaths through my mouth, nostrils, and ears. And as I stopped the in-breaths and out-breaths from my mouth, nostrils, and ears, the [imprisoned] air beat upon my head with great violence. Just as if a strong man were to bore one’s head with a sharp drill, even so did the air beat my head with great violence when I stopped breathing. Even though such painful sensations arose in me, they did not at all affect my mind.*

*“Then, I thought to myself: ‘What if I were to practice the non-breathing austerity again.’ Accordingly, I stopped the in-breaths and out-breaths through my mouth, nostrils, and ears. And as I stopped breathing thus, terrible pains arose in my head. Just as if a strong man were to bind one’s head tightly with a hard leather strap, even so were the terrible pains that arose in my head.*

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<sup>34</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, part I, no. 36; Bhikkhu Ñānamoli, *The Life of the Buddha According to the Pāli Canon* (Seattle, WA: PBS Pariyatti Editions [3rd ed. 1992]), pp. 17—18; Bhikkhu Bodhi (ed.), *In the Buddha’s Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pāli Canon* (Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications [2005]), pp. 61—63.



*Nevertheless, my energy was strenuous. Such painful sensations did not affect my mind.*

*“Then, I thought to myself: ‘What if I were to practice the non-breathing austerity yet again.’ Accordingly, I stopped the in-breaths and out-breaths through my mouth, nostrils, and ears. And as I stopped breathing thus, violent winds pierced my belly. Just as if a skillful butcher or a butcher’s apprentice were to rip up the belly with a sharp butcher’s knife, even so, violent winds pierced my belly. Nevertheless, my energy was strenuous. Such painful sensations did not affect my mind.*

*“Again, I thought to myself: ‘What if I were to practice the non-breathing austerity once again.’ Accordingly, I stopped the in-breaths and out-breaths through my mouth, nostrils, and ears. And as I stopped breathing thus, a tremendous burning sensation pervaded my body. Just as if two strong men were to seize a weaker man by his arms and scorch and thoroughly burn him in a pit of glowing coals, even so did a severe burning sensation pervade my body. Nevertheless, my energy was strenuous. Such painful sensations did not affect my mind.*

*“Thereupon, some of the deities who were watching me said thus: ‘The Ascetic Gotama is dead.’ Others remarked: ‘The Ascetic Gotama is not dead yet but is dying.’ While others said: ‘The Ascetic Gotama is neither dead nor dying but is an Arahāt, for such is the way in which Arahāts abide’.”*

### **Change of Method: Abstinence from Food**

*“Then, I thought to myself: ‘What if I were to practice complete abstinence from food.’ Then, deities came to me and said: ‘Good sir, do not practice complete abstinence from food. If you do so, we will pour heavenly food into your body through the pores of your skin, and so you will be nourished.’ And I thought: ‘If I claim to be completely fasting while these deities are nourishing my body by pouring heavenly food through the pores of my skin, it would be a fraud on my part.’ So I refused them saying: ‘There is no need.’”*

*“Then, the following thought occurred to me: ‘What if I take very little food, a small quantity each time of the juice of beans or lentils or vetch or peas.’ So, I took very little food, a small quantity each time of the juice of beans or lentils or vetch or peas. In so doing, my body became extremely emaciated. Due to eating so little, my limbs became like the jointed segments of vine stems or bamboo stems. Due to eating so little, my backside became like a camel’s hoof. Due to eating so little, the vertebrae stood out from the skin on my back like a string of beads. Due to eating so little, my ribs jutted out like the rafters of an old roofless barn. Due to eating so little, the gleam left my eyes, and they sank deep in their sockets like the stars that may be seen reflected in the water of a deep well. Due to eating so little, my scalp shriveled and withered like slices of a bitter*

*pumpkin, which become shriveled and withered by the wind and sun. Due to eating so little, I could feel my backbone when I touched the skin on my stomach, and I could feel the skin of my stomach when I touched my backbone. I was so thin that the skin of my stomach clung to my backbone, and when I urinated or defecated, I would stumble and fall down in that very spot. Due to eating so little, when I tried to ease my pain by rubbing my limbs with my hands, the hair, rotted at its roots, fell from my body as I rubbed.*

*“When people saw me, some of them said: ‘The Ascetic Gotama is black.’ Some said: ‘The Ascetic Gotama is not black but blue.’ Others said: ‘The Ascetic Gotama is neither black nor blue but golden colored.’ That is how much the pure color of my skin had deteriorated from eating so little.*

*“Then, the following thought occurred to me: ‘Whatever recluses and Brahmins of the past might have experienced in the way of acute, painful, sharp, and piercing sensations, they could only have experienced them to a degree as high as this and not beyond. Whatever recluses and Brahmins of the future will experience in the way of acute, painful, sharp, and piercing sensations, they, too, can experience them only to a degree as high as this and not beyond. Yet, even though I have practiced all of these bitter and difficult austerities, I have not attained any superhuman states nor any supreme knowledge and insight worthy of the noble ones. Could there be another path to Enlightenment?’”<sup>35</sup>*

### **Temptation by Māra, the Evil One**

His prolonged, painful austerities proved utterly futile. They only resulted in the exhaustion of His valuable energy. Though physically fit, His delicately nurtured body could not possibly stand the great strain. His graceful form completely faded almost beyond recognition. His golden-colored skin turned pale, His blood dried up, His sinews and muscles shriveled up, His eyes were sunken and blurred. To all appearances, He was a living skeleton. He was almost on the verge of death.

At this critical stage, while He was abiding on the banks of the Nerañjarā River still striving after the Highest Good (*padhāna*), the incomparable path to Supreme Peace, along came Namuci,<sup>36</sup> uttering kind words thus:

*“You are lean and deformed. Death is near to you. A thousand parts of you belong to death; to life, there remains but one. Live, O good sir! Life is better.*

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<sup>35</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, part I, Mahāsaccaka Sutta, no. 36; Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, *The Life of the Buddha According to the Pāli Canon* (Seattle, WA: PBS Pariyatti Editions [3rd ed. 1992]), pp. 18—21; Bhikkhu Bodhi (ed.), *In the Buddha’s Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pāli Canon* (Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications [2005]), pp. 63—64.

<sup>36</sup> Another name for Māra. According to the scriptures, there are five kinds of Māras: (1) Deity Māra (*Devaputta*); (2) passions, or defilements (*kilesa*); (3) karmic activities (*abhisamkhāra*); (4) aggregates (*khandha*); and (5) death (*maccu*).

*By living, you could perform merit. By leading a life of celibacy and making fire sacrifices, much merit could be acquired. What will you do with this striving? Hard is the path of striving, difficult and not easily accomplished.”*

Reciting these words, Māra stood in the presence of the Exalted One. The Exalted One replied thus to Māra:

*“O Evil One, kinsman of the heedless! You have come here for your own sake. Even the tiniest bit of merit is of no avail. You should speak like this to those who are in need of merit, O Māra. Confidence (saddhā), self-control (tapo), perseverance (viriya), and wisdom (paññā) are mine. Why do you question me, who is thus intent, about life?*

*“Even the streams and rivers will be dried up by the wind. Why should not my blood dry up through practicing austerities? When blood dries up, the bile and phlegm also dry up. When my body wastes away, more and more does my mind become clarified. Still more do my mindfulness, wisdom, and concentration become firm.*

*“While I live thus, experiencing the utmost pain, my mind does not long for lust. Behold the purity of a being!*

*“Desire for gratification of the senses (kāma) is your first army. The second is called aversion (arati) for the Holy Life (brahmacariya). The third is hunger and thirst (khuppīpāsā).<sup>37</sup> The fourth is called craving (taṇhā). The fifth is sloth and torpor (thīna-middha). The sixth is called fear (bhīru). The seventh is doubt (vicikicchā),<sup>38</sup> and the eighth is distraction and stubbornness (makkha-thambha). The ninth is gain (lābha), praise (siloka) and honor (sakkāra), and ill-gotten fame (yasa). The tenth is the extolling of oneself and contempt for others (attukkaṃ-saṇaparavāma-bhāna).*

*“This, Namuci, is your army, the opposing host of the Evil One. He who does not overcome that army is a coward, but he who does overcome it obtains happiness.*

*“Do you see this muñja<sup>39</sup> that I am wearing? I do not care about life in this world! I would rather die in battle than live in defeat. There are some ascetics and Brahmins who are not engaged in this battle — they will never know nor tread the path of the virtuous. Seeing the army all around me, with Māra riding on an elephant, I go forward into battle. Māra shall not drive me from my position. Even though the whole world, including the gods, cannot defeat that army of yours, I am going to destroy it with the power of Wisdom as I would an unbaked clay pot with a stone.*

<sup>37</sup> Resulting from voluntary poverty.

<sup>38</sup> That is, indecision as to the certainty of the Goal.

<sup>39</sup> Warriors wore a *muñja* grass crest on their heads or on their banners to indicate that they would not retreat from the battlefield.

*“With my thoughts under control and well-established in Mindfulness (sati), I shall wander from country to country training many disciples. Diligent, intent, and practicing my Teachings, they will disregard you and will attain that, which having been attained, will lead them not to grief.”<sup>40</sup>*

### **The Middle Path**

The Ascetic Gotama was now fully convinced, on the basis of His own experience, of the utter futility of self-mortification, which, though considered indispensable for Liberation by the ascetic philosophers of the day, actually weakened one’s intellect and beat down one’s spirit. He abandoned forever this painful extreme, as did He the other extreme of self-indulgence, which tends to retard moral progress. He conceived the idea of adopting the Middle Path (*majjhimā-paṭipadā*), which later became one of the salient features of His Teaching.

He recalled how, when His father was engaged in plowing, He sat in the cool shade of the rose-apple tree, absorbed in the contemplation of His in-breaths and out-breaths, which resulted in the attainment of the first *jhāna* (absorption). Thereupon, He thought to Himself: “Well, this is the path to Enlightenment.”

He realized that Enlightenment could not be gained with such an utterly exhausted body. Physical fitness was essential for spiritual progress. Consequently, He decided to nourish His body sparingly and took some coarse food, both hard and soft.

The five favorite disciples, who were attending on Him with great hopes, thinking that whatever truth the Ascetic Gotama would comprehend would then be imparted to them, felt disappointed at this unexpected change of method. Thereupon, they left Him and the place too and went to Isipatana, saying that: “The Ascetic Gotama has become luxurious, has ceased from striving, and has returned to the life of comfort.”

At a crucial time, when help was most welcome, His companions deserted Him, leaving Him alone. He was not discouraged, but their voluntary departure was advantageous to Him, though their presence during His great struggle had been helpful. Alone and undistracted, in a peaceful forest setting, great men often realize deep truths and solve intricate problems.

### **The Dawn of Truth**

Regaining His lost strength through eating some coarse food, He easily developed the first *jhāna*, which He had gained in His youth.<sup>41</sup> By degrees, He developed the second, third, and fourth *jhānas* as well.

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<sup>40</sup> *Sutta Nipāta*, Padhāna Sutta.

<sup>41</sup> When Prince Siddhattha was seven years old, King Suddhodana took Him to a plowing festival. During the festivities, the young prince was taken by His attendants to rest under a rose-apple tree on a specially-prepared couch. While seated there, He forgot about the festival and fell into meditation.

By developing the *jhānas*, He gained perfect one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*) of the mind. His mind was like a polished mirror, where everything is reflected in its true perspective.

Thus, with thoughts tranquilized, purified, cleansed, free from lust and impurity, pliable, alert, steady, and unshakable, He directed His mind to the knowledge regarding “The Remembrance of Past Births” (*pubbe-nivāsānussati ñāṇa*). He recalled the circumstances of His former existences as follows: first one life, then two lives, then three, four, five, ten, twenty, up to fifty lives; then a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand; then the dissolution of many world cycles, then the evolution of many world cycles, then both the dissolution and evolution of many world cycles. In that place, He was of such a name, such a family, such a caste, such a dietary, such the pleasure and pain He experienced, such His life’s end. Departing from there, He came into existence elsewhere — then such was His name, such His family, such His caste, such His dietary, such the pleasure and pain He experienced, such His life’s end. Departing from there, He came into existence here. Thus, He recalled the circumstances of His former lives. *This, indeed, was the First Knowledge that He realized in the first watch of the night.*

Dispelling, thus, ignorance with regard to the past, He directed His purified mind to “The Knowledge of the Disappearing and Reappearing of Beings” (*cutūpapāta ñāṇa*). With clairvoyant vision, purified and supernormal, He perceived beings disappearing from one state of existence and reappearing in another; He beheld the lowly and the noble, the beautiful and the ugly, the happy and the miserable, all passing according to their deeds. He knew that these good individuals, by evil deeds, words, and thoughts, by belittling the Noble Ones, by believing that which is false, and by conforming to the mistaken views of others, had been born in sorrowful states after death and the dissolution of their bodies. He knew that these good individuals, by good deeds, words, and thoughts, by respecting the Noble Ones, by believing that which is true, and by conforming to the truth, had been born in happy states after death and the dissolution of their bodies. Thus, with clairvoyant supernormal vision, He beheld the disappearing and reappearing of beings. *This, indeed, was the Second Knowledge that He realized in the middle watch of the night.*

Dispelling, thus, ignorance with regard to the future, He directed His purified mind to “The Knowledge of the Cessation of Corruptions”<sup>42</sup> (*āsavakkhaya ñāṇa*). He realized in accordance with fact: “This is Suffering (*dukkha-sacca*),” “This is the Arising of Suffering (*samudaya-sacca*),” “This is the Cessation of Suffering (*nirodha-sacca*),” “This is the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering (*magga-sacca*).” Likewise, in accordance with fact, He realized: “These are the Corruptions (*āsavas*),” “This is the Arising of Corruptions,” “This is the Cessation of Corruptions,” “This is the Path leading to the Cessation of Corruptions.” Thus cognizing, thus perceiving, His mind was

<sup>42</sup> *Āsavas* “corruptions”. These *āsavas* extend to the highest plane of existence, with respect to spheres, or up to the *Gotrabhū* state, with respect to mind-flux. There are four *āsavas*: (1) sensory desires, that is, desire for gratification of the senses (*kāma*); (2) desire for (eternal) existence (*bhava*); (3) false views (*diṭṭhi*); and (4) ignorance (*avijjā*). In this particular text, only three are mentioned. Here, *bhava* means the desire to be born in the realms of form (*rūpa bhava*) and the formless realms (*arūpa bhava*).

delivered from the Corruption of Craving for the Gratification of the Senses (*kāmāsava*), from the Corruption of Craving for (eternal) Existence (*bhavāsava*), and from the Corruption of Ignorance (*avijjāsava*). Being delivered, He knew: “Delivered am I,” and He realized: “Rebirth is ended; fulfilled is the Holy Life; done what was to be done; there will be no more of this state again.” *This was the Third Knowledge that He realized in the last watch of the night.* Ignorance was dispelled, and wisdom arose; darkness vanished, and light arose. ■



# 3

## Buddhahood

*“All the effort must be made by you; the Tathāgatas can only show the way.”<sup>43</sup>*

### Characteristics of the Buddha

After a stupendous struggle of six strenuous years, in His 35th year, the Ascetic Gotama, unaided and unguided by any supernatural agency, and, relying solely on His own efforts and wisdom, eradicated all defilements, ended the process of grasping, and, realizing things as they truly are by His own intuitive knowledge, became a *Buddha* — an Enlightened or Awakened One.

Thereafter, He was known as Buddha Gotama,<sup>44</sup> one of a long series of *Buddhas* who appeared in the past and who will appear in the future. He was not born a *Buddha* but became a *Buddha* by His own efforts.

The Pāli term *Buddha* is derived from *budh-* “to understand, to be awakened.” Inasmuch as He fully comprehended the Four Noble Truths and arose from the slumbers of ignorance (*avijjā*), He is called a *Buddha*. Since He not only comprehended but also expounded the doctrine and enlightened others, He is called *Sammā Sambuddha*, “A Fully Enlightened One,” to distinguish Him from *Pacceka Buddhas* (“Individual *Buddhas*”), who only comprehend the doctrine but are incapable of enlightening others.

Before His Enlightenment, He was called *Bodhisatta*,<sup>45</sup> which means “one who is aspiring to attain Buddhahood.” Every aspirant to Buddhahood passes through the *Bodhisatta* Period — a period of intense exercise and development of ten transcendental virtues (the so-called “perfections” [*pāramī* or *pāramitā*]): (1) generosity (*dāna*); (2) morality (discipline) (*sīla*); (3) renunciation (of worldly ties) (*nekkhamma*); (4) wisdom (*paññā*); (5) energy (perseverance) (*virīya*); (6) patience (endurance) (*khanti*); (7) truthfulness (*sacca*); (8) determination (to attain the Goal — *nibbāna*) (*adhiṭṭhāna*); (9) loving-kindness (that is, unlimited, universal love and goodwill) (*mettā*); and (10) perfect equanimity (*upekkhā*).

<sup>43</sup> The *Dhammapada*, XX, The Path, verse 276.

<sup>44</sup> His disciples addressed Him as *Buddha* “Enlightened One,” *Bhagavā* “Exalted One,” *Sugata* “Well-gone One,” etc., while non-followers addressed Him as *Bho Gotama* “Venerable Gotama,” *Samana Gotama* “Ascetic Gotama,” etc. Referring to Himself, the *Buddha* used the term *Tathāgata*, meaning “He who has thus come,” “He who has thus gone.”

<sup>45</sup> Sanskrit *Bodhisattva*. See footnote 24.

In any particular era, there can arise only one *Sammā Sambuddha* (A Fully Enlightened *Buddha*). Just as certain plants and trees can bear only one flower, just so, one world-system (*lokadhātu*) can bear only one *Sammā Sambuddha*.

A *Buddha* is a unique being. Such a being arises but rarely in this world and is born out of compassion for the world, for the good, benefit, and happiness of gods<sup>46</sup> and men. The *Buddha* is called *acchariya manussa* since He was a Wonderful Man. He is called *amatassa dātā* since He is the Giver of Deathlessness. He is called *varado* since He is the Giver of the Purest Love, the Profoundest Wisdom, and the Highest Truth. He is also called *Dhammassāmi* since He is the Lord of the *Dhamma*<sup>47</sup> (Doctrine).

As the *Buddha* Himself says:

*“The Accomplished One (Tathāgata), the Worthy One (Arahatta), the Fully Enlightened One (Sammā Sambuddha), is the Originator of the Unarisen Way, the Producer of the Unproduced Way, the Proclaimer of the Unproclaimed Way, the Knower of the Way, the Beholder of the Way, the Cognizer of the Way, and His disciples now dwell following that Way and become possessed of it afterward.”*<sup>48</sup>

The *Buddha* had no teacher for His Enlightenment: *na me ācariyo atthi* “I have no teacher” are His own words. He did receive His mundane knowledge from His lay teachers,<sup>49</sup> but He had no teachers for His supramundane knowledge, which He realized by His own intuitive wisdom. If He had received His knowledge from another teacher or from another religious system such as Hinduism, which was the religion in which He was brought up, He could not have said of Himself that He was the Incomparable Teacher (*aham satthā anuttaro*). In His first discourse, He declared that light arose concerning things that had not been heard before.

*“I am the one who has transcended all, a knower of all, unsullied among all things, renouncing all, by the ceasing of craving am I freed. Having known this all for myself, to whom should I point as teacher?”*

*“I have no teacher, and there exists no one else in all the world like me, with all its devas, because there is no one who is my counterpart.”*

<sup>46</sup> *Devas* “heavenly, or celestial, beings; gods; deities.” *Devas* are beings who inhabit celestial planes and who, as a rule, are invisible to humans. However, like all other beings, including humans, they are subject to repeated rebirth, old age, and death and are, thus, not freed from the cycle of rebirth and suffering (*saṃsāra*). There are many classes of *devas*.

<sup>47</sup> Sanskrit *dharma* “doctrine, teachings.” The *Dhamma*, as the liberating law discovered by the *Buddha*, is summed up in the Four Noble Truths. It forms one of the Three Gems (*tiratana*, that is, the *Buddha*, the *Dhamma*, and the *Sangha*) and one of the ten recollections (*anussati*): (1) the *Buddha*; (2) the *Dhamma*; (3) the *Sangha*; (4) morality; (5) generosity; (6) heavenly beings; (7) mindfulness on death; (8) mindfulness on the body; (9) mindfulness on breathing; and (10) the recollection of peace.

<sup>48</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 22:58; Bhikkhu Bodhi (ed.), *In the Buddha’s Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pāli Canon* (Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications [2005]), p. 414.

<sup>49</sup> Such as Koṇḍañña, Ālāra Kālāma, Uddaka Rāmaputta, etc.



*“For I am the Arahāt in the world, the supreme teacher. I, alone, am a Fully Enlightened One, whose fires are quenched and extinguished.”*<sup>50</sup>

During the early period of His renunciation, He sought guidance from several distinguished religious teachers of the day, but He could not find what He sought in their teachings. Circumstances compelled Him to rely on His own intuitive powers to search for the Truth. He sought the Truth within Himself. He plunged into the deepest profundities of thought, and He realized the ultimate Truth, which He had not known or heard before. Thus, illumination came from within and shed light on things that He had never seen before.

Inasmuch as He knew everything that ought to be known to attain Enlightenment, He is called *Sabbāññu*, “the Omniscient One.”<sup>51</sup> He acquired this knowledge by His own efforts, continued through a countless series of births.

### Who Is the Buddha?

Once, the *Buddha* was traveling along the road between Ukkatṭhā and Setavyā. A certain Brahmin named Doṇa happened to be traveling along the same road at the same time. Noticing the characteristic marks of the footprints of the *Buddha*, Doṇa thought to himself:

*“This is wonderful, this is marvelous. Surely, these cannot be the footprints of a human being.”*

<sup>50</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, part I, Ariyapariyesanā Sutta, no. 26; Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, *The Life of the Buddha According to the Pāli Canon* (Seattle, WA: PBS Pariyatti Editions [3rd ed. 1992]), p. 40; Bhikkhu Bodhi (ed.), *In the Buddha’s Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pāli Canon* (Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications [2005]), p. 73.

<sup>51</sup> Quite contradictory views have been expressed by different Buddhist traditions on the exact nature and scope of the *Buddha*’s omniscience (*sabbāññutā-ñāṇa*). According to the Theravādin School, the *Buddha*’s principal claim was that He had broken the cycle of rebirth (*samsāra*) and that He had done this by overcoming any tendencies within Him towards greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*). The proper test of the profundity of His realization, then, is not in asking Him obscure questions on topics about which He could not possibly be expected to have knowledge, but in examining His conduct for any evidence that He fell short of His claim. Indeed, this is a test that He Himself proposes for the assessment of a sage’s attainment and so of his or her reliability as a teacher. The primary means of evaluating spiritual integrity, then, is to examine the ethical purity of the sage, not his or her magical powers (should he or she have any) nor the scope of his or her mundane knowledge. The *Buddha* may or may not have had all sorts of magical abilities, but these considerations should not obscure what is most fundamentally important about Him and what He realized.

The *Buddha* Himself categorically denied being omniscient. Those who declare Him to be omniscient, He says, “misrepresent me with what is untrue and contrary to fact” (*Majjhima Nikāya*, Tevijjavacchagotta Sutta, no. 71). In the same discourse, He goes on to explain that what He does possess is the “threefold true knowledge” (*tevijjā*): (1) recollection of manifold past lives, (2) the ability to see beings passing away and being reborn according to their deeds, and (3) direct knowledge of the destruction of the taints (*āsava*).

Then, the *Buddha* left the road and sat down, cross-legged, at the foot of a tree, with His body erect and with mindfulness established before Him. Doṇa, who was following the footprints, saw the Blessed One sitting at the foot of the tree. Thereupon, he approached the Blessed One and asked:

“Is Your Reverence a deva?”

“No, indeed, Brahmin, I am not a deva.”

“Then, is Your Reverence a gandhabba?”<sup>52</sup>

“No, indeed, Brahmin, I am not a gandhabba.”

“A yakkha<sup>53</sup> then?”

“No, indeed, Brahmin, not a yakkha.”

“Then, is Your Reverence a human being?”

“No, indeed, Brahmin, I am not a human being.”

“Who then, pray, are You?”<sup>54</sup>

The *Buddha* replied that He had destroyed defilements that condition rebirth as a *deva*, *gandhabba*, *yakkha*, or a human being and added:

“As a lotus fair and lovely is not soiled by the water, I am not soiled by the world. Therefore, Brahmin, I am a Buddha.”

The *Buddha* did not claim to be an incarnation (*avatāra*) of the Hindu god Vishnu, who, as the *Bhagavadgītā* charmingly proclaims, is born again and again in different periods to protect the righteous, to destroy the wicked, and to establish the *Dharma* (the right way).<sup>55</sup>

According to the *Buddha*, countless are the gods (*devas*), who are also a class of beings subject to birth and death; but there is no one Supreme God who controls the destinies of human beings and who possesses a divine power to appear on earth at different intervals, employing a human form as a vehicle.

Nor does the *Buddha* call Himself a “Savior,” who freely saves others by His personal salvation. The *Buddha* exhorts His followers to depend on themselves for their own liberation, since both defilement and purity depend on oneself. One cannot directly purify or defile another. Clarifying His relationship with His followers and emphasizing the importance of self-reliance and individual striving, the *Buddha* plainly states:

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<sup>52</sup> A *gandhabba* is a heavenly musician.

<sup>53</sup> A *yakkha* is a demon.

<sup>54</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya* 4:36; Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, *The Life of the Buddha According to the Pāli Canon* (Seattle, WA: PBS Pariyatti Editions [3rd ed. 1992]), pp. 187—188.

<sup>55</sup> Hindu teachers, however, with the objective of bringing the increasing number of adherents of Buddhism within the fold of Hinduism, have unjustly called the *Buddha* God’s incarnation (*avatāra*), an idea that He repudiated in His own time.

*“All the effort must be made by you; the Tathāgatas can only show the way.”*<sup>56</sup>

The *Buddha* only indicates the path and method whereby He delivered Himself from suffering and death and achieved His ultimate goal. It is the responsibility of His faithful followers to follow that path so that they, too, may find release from the ills of life. To depend on others for liberation leads nowhere — it means surrendering one’s own effort. To depend on others is negative, but to depend upon oneself is positive.

*“Therefore, Ānanda, you should live as islands unto yourselves, being your own refuge, with no one else as your refuge, with the Dhamma as an island, with the Dhamma as your refuge, with no other refuge.”*<sup>57</sup>

These significant words, uttered by the *Buddha* in His last days, are very striking and inspiring. They reveal how vital self-effort is to accomplish one’s goal and how superficial and futile it is to seek liberation through the kindness of saviors and crave for illusory happiness in an afterlife through the propitiation of imaginary gods by fruitless prayers and meaningless sacrifices.

The *Buddha* was a human being. He was born as a man, He lived as a *Buddha*, and His life came to an end as a *Buddha*. Though human, He became an extraordinary man owing to His unique characteristics. The *Buddha* laid stress on this important point and left no room for anyone to fall into the error of thinking that He was an immortal being. It has been said of Him that there was no religious teacher who was “ever so godless as the *Buddha*, yet none so god-like.”<sup>58</sup> In His own time, the *Buddha* was, no doubt, highly venerated by His followers, but He never arrogated any divinity to Himself.

### The Buddha’s Greatness

Born a man, living as a mortal, by His own efforts, He attained that supreme state of perfection called Buddhahood, and, without keeping His Enlightenment to Himself, He proclaimed to the world the latent possibilities and the invincible power of the human mind. Instead of placing an unseen Almighty God over man and giving man a subservient position in relation to such a conception of divine power, He demonstrated how man could attain the highest knowledge and Supreme Enlightenment by His own efforts. He thus raised the worth of man. He taught that man can gain liberation from the ills of life and realize the eternal bliss of *nibbāna* without depending upon an external God or mediating priests. He taught the egocentric, power-seeking world the noble ideal of selfless service. He protested against the evils of the caste system, which hampered the progress of mankind, and He advocated equal opportunities for all. He declared that

<sup>56</sup> The *Dhammapada*, XX, The Path, verse 276.

<sup>57</sup> *Dīgha Nikāya*, Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, no. 16; Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, *The Life of the Buddha According to the Pāli Canon* (Seattle, WA: PBS Pariyatti Editions [3rd ed. 1992]), p. 300.

<sup>58</sup> Dwight Goddard, *Buddhist Bible*, p. 20.

the path to liberation was open to all, in every condition of life, high or low, saint or sinner, who would care to turn over a new leaf and aspire to perfection. He raised the status of women, and not only brought them to a realization of their importance to society but also founded the first religious order for women. For the first time in the history of the world, He attempted to abolish slavery. He banned the sacrifice of animals and brought them within the scope of His loving-kindness. He did not force His followers to be slaves either to His Teachings or to Himself but granted them complete freedom of thought and admonished them not to accept His words merely out of respect for Him but only after subjecting the Teachings to a thorough examination “even as the wise would test gold by burning, cutting, and rubbing it on a piece of touchstone.” He comforted bereaved mothers like Patācārā and Kisāgotamī by His consoling words. He ministered to the deserted sick like Putigatta Tissa Thera with His own hands. He helped the poor and the neglected like Rajjumālā and Sopāka and saved them from an untimely and tragic death. He ennobled the lives of criminals like Angulimāla and courtesans like Ambapālī. He encouraged the feeble, united those who were divided, enlightened the ignorant, clarified the mystic, guided the deluded, elevated the lowly, and dignified the noble. The rich and the poor, the saint and the criminal loved Him alike. His noble example was a source of inspiration to all. He was the most compassionate and tolerant of teachers.

His will, wisdom, compassion, service, renunciation, perfect purity, exemplary personal life, the blameless methods that were employed to propagate the *Dhamma*, and His final success — all these factors have compelled one fifth of the world to hail the *Buddha* as the greatest religious teacher who ever lived on earth. ■

# 4

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## After His Enlightenment

*“Happy is this world of non-attachment.”*<sup>59</sup>

### The Seven Weeks

In the memorable forenoon, immediately preceding the morn of His Enlightenment, while the Bodhisatta Gotama was seated under the Ajapāla banyan tree in close proximity to the *bodhi*-tree,<sup>60</sup> a generous lady, named Sujātā, unexpectedly offered Him some rich milk-rice, specially prepared by her with great care. He ate this nourishing meal and, after His Enlightenment, the *Buddha* fasted for seven weeks and spent a quiet time in deep contemplation under the *bodhi*-tree and in its neighborhood.

### The First Week

Throughout the first week, the *Buddha* sat under the *bodhi*-tree in one posture experiencing the Bliss of Emancipation (*vimutti sukha*).<sup>61</sup>

After those seven days had elapsed, the *Buddha* emerged from the state of concentration and, during the first watch of the night, thoroughly reflected on “Dependent Origination” (*paṭicca samuppāda*) in direct order thus: “When this is, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises.”

1. Dependent upon Ignorance (*avijjā*), moral and immoral Conditioning Activities (*saṃkhāra*) arise;
2. Dependent upon Conditioning Activities (*saṃkhāra*), (Relinking) Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) arises;
3. Dependent upon Consciousness (*viññāṇa*), Mind and Matter (*nāma-rūpa*) arise;
4. Dependent upon Mind and Matter (*nāma-rūpa*), the Six Sense Faculties (*saḷāyatana*) arise;
5. Dependent upon the Six Sense Faculties (*saḷāyatana*), Contact (*phassa*) arises;

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<sup>59</sup> *Khuddaka Nikāya, Udāna.*

<sup>60</sup> The famous pipal tree at Bodhgaya in northern India which sheltered Him during His struggle for Enlightenment.

<sup>61</sup> That is, the Fruit of Arahantship.

6. Dependent upon Contact (*phassa*), Feeling (*vedanā*) arises;
7. Dependent upon Feeling (*vedanā*), Craving (*taṇhā*) arises;
8. Dependent upon Craving (*taṇhā*), Grasping (*upādāna*) arises;
9. Dependent upon Grasping (*upādāna*), Becoming (*bhava*) arises;
10. Dependent upon Becoming (*bhava*), Birth (*jāti*) arises;
11. Dependent upon Birth (*jāti*), Decay (*jarā*), Death (*maraṇa*), Sorrow (*soka*), Lamentation (*parideva*), Pain (*dukkha*), Grief (*domanassa*), and Despair (*upāyāsa*) arise.

Thus does this whole mass of suffering originate.

Thereupon, the Exalted One, knowing the meaning of this, uttered, at that time, this paean of joy:

*“When, indeed, the truths become manifest to the strenuous, meditative Brāhmaṇa,<sup>62</sup> then do all his doubts vanish away, since he knows the truth together with its cause.”*

During the middle watch of the night, the Exalted One thoroughly reflected on “Dependent Origination” (*paṭicca samuppāda*) in reverse order, thus: “When this is not, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases.”

1. With the cessation of Ignorance (*avijjā*), moral and immoral Conditioning Activities (*saṃkhāra*) cease;
2. With the cessation of Conditioning Activities (*saṃkhāra*), (Relinking) Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) ceases;
3. With the cessation of Consciousness (*viññāṇa*), Mind and Matter (*nāma-rūpa*) cease;
4. With the cessation of Mind and Matter (*nāma-rūpa*), the Six Sense Faculties (*saḷāyatana*) cease;
5. With the cessation of the Six Sense Faculties (*saḷāyatana*), Contact (*phassa*) ceases;
6. With the cessation of Contact (*phassa*), Feeling (*vedanā*) ceases;
7. With the cessation of Feeling (*vedanā*), Craving (*taṇhā*) ceases;
8. With the cessation of Craving (*taṇhā*), Grasping (*upādāna*) ceases;
9. With the cessation of Grasping (*upādāna*), Becoming (*bhava*) ceases;
10. With the cessation of Becoming (*bhava*), Birth (*jāti*) ceases;
11. With the cessation of Birth (*jāti*), Decay (*jarā*), Death (*maraṇa*), Sorrow (*soka*), Lamentation (*parideva*), Pain (*dukkha*), Grief (*domanassa*), and Despair (*upāyāsa*) cease.

Thus does this whole mass of suffering cease.

<sup>62</sup> “Brahmin” is a term that means “one who studies the Vedas” — it is generally applied to the Priestly Caste, the highest of the four castes (*vaṇṇa*). Sometimes, the *Buddha* uses this term in the sense “one who has discarded evil,” “a Saint.” In this book, “*brāhmaṇa*” is used to denote a Saint, and “Brahmin” to denote a member of the Priestly Caste.

Thereupon, the Exalted One, knowing the meaning of this, uttered, for the second time, this paean of joy:

*“When, indeed, the truths become manifest to the strenuous, meditative brāhmaṇa, then do all his doubts vanish away, since he knows the truth together with its cause.”*

During the third watch of the night, the Exalted One reflected on “Dependent Origination” both in direct and reverse order, thus: “When this is, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this is not, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases.” Thus does this whole mass of suffering arise, and thus does it cease.

Thereupon, the Exalted One, knowing the meaning of this, uttered, for the third time, this paean of joy:

*“When, indeed, the truths become manifest to the strenuous, meditative brāhmaṇa, then do all his doubts vanish away, since he knows the truth together with its cause.”*

## Second Week

The second week was uneventful, but the *Buddha* silently taught a great moral lesson to the world. As a mark of profound gratitude to the inanimate *bodhi*-tree that had sheltered Him during His struggle for Enlightenment, He stood at a certain distance gazing at the tree with motionless eyes for one whole week.<sup>63</sup>

Following His noble example, His followers, in memory of His Enlightenment, still venerate not only the original *bodhi*-tree but also its descendants.<sup>64</sup>

## Third Week

Inasmuch as the *Buddha* had not given up His temporary residence under the *bodhi*-tree, the *devas* doubted His attainment of Buddhahood. The *Buddha* read their thoughts, and, in order to clear away their doubts, He used His psychic powers to create a jeweled ambulatory (*ratana caṃkamana*) and paced back and forth for another week.

<sup>63</sup> On the spot where the *Buddha* stood, a *cetiya* (a type of sepulchral monument, a *stūpa*) was erected by King Asoka. This was named Animisalocana Cetiya and can still be seen.

<sup>64</sup> The right-hand branch of the original *bodhi*-tree was brought to Śri Lanka (Ceylon) by Sanghamittā Therī and planted by King Devānampiyatissa at Anuradhapura, the ancient capital of Śri Lanka. It still exists in flourishing condition, even though it is more than 2,000 years old.



### Fourth Week

The *Buddha* spent the fourth week in a jeweled chamber (*ratanaghara*<sup>65</sup>) contemplating the intricacies of the *Abhidhamma* (Higher Teaching). Books state that His mind and body were so purified when He pondered on the Book of Relations (*Paṭṭhāna*), the seventh treatise of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, that six colored rays emitted from His body.<sup>66</sup>

### Fifth Week

During the fifth week too, the *Buddha* enjoyed the Bliss of Emancipation (*vimuttisukha*), seated in one posture under the famous Ajapāla banyan tree in the vicinity of the *bodhi*-tree. When He arose from that transcendental state, a conceited Brahmin approached Him and, after the customary salutations and friendly greetings, questioned Him thus:

*“In what respect, O Venerable Gotama, does one become a brāhmaṇa and what are the conditions that make a brāhmaṇa?”*

The *Buddha* uttered this paean of joy in reply:

*“That Brahmin who has discarded evil, who is without conceit, who is free from Defilements, who is self-controlled, who is versed in knowledge, and who has led the Holy Life rightly, would call himself a brāhmaṇa. For him, there is no elation anywhere in this world.”*<sup>67</sup>

According to the *Jātaka* Commentary, it was during this week that the daughters of Māra, Taṇhā, Aratī, and Rāgā,<sup>68</sup> made a vain attempt to tempt the *Buddha* by their charms.

### Sixth Week

From the Ajapāla banyan tree, the *Buddha* proceeded to the Mucalinda tree, where He spent the sixth week, again enjoying the Bliss of Emancipation. At that time, there arose an unexpected great shower. Rain clouds and gloomy weather with cold winds prevailed for several days. Thereupon, Mucalinda, the serpent-king, came out of

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<sup>65</sup> So called because the *Buddha* reflected on the jewels of the *Abhidhamma*.

<sup>66</sup> Namely, blue (*nīla*), yellow (*pīṭa*), red (*lohita*), white (*odāta*), orange (*mañjettha*), and a mixture of these five colors (*pabhassara*).

<sup>67</sup> *Khuddaka Nikāya, Udāna*.

<sup>68</sup> These three cannot have been personified passions since the incident took place after the Enlightenment.



his abode and, coiling around the *Buddha* seven times, remained, keeping his large hood over the head of the *Buddha* so that He might not be affected by the elements.

At the close of seven days, Mucalinda, seeing the clear, cloudless sky, uncoiled himself from around the body of the *Buddha*, took on the guise of a young man, and stood in front of the Exalted One with clasped hands. Thereupon, the *Buddha* uttered this paean of joy:

*“Happy is seclusion to him who is contented, to him who has heard the Truth, and to him who sees. Happy is goodwill in this world, and so is restraint towards all beings. Happy in this world is non-attachment, the passing beyond of sensory desires. The suppression of ego conceitedness is, indeed, the highest happiness.”*<sup>69</sup>

### Seventh Week

The *Buddha* peacefully passed the seventh week at the Rājāyatana tree, experiencing the Bliss of Emancipation.

### One of the First Utterances of the Buddha<sup>70</sup>

*“I have gone through many rounds of birth and death, seeking, but not finding, the builder of this house.”*<sup>71</sup> *Sorrowful, indeed, is birth and death again and again! But now I have seen you, Oh house-builder; you shall not build this house [for me] again — its rafters are broken; its ridgepole is shattered. My mind has reached the unconditioned; the end of craving*<sup>72</sup> *has been attained.”*<sup>73</sup>

At dawn, on the very day of His Enlightenment, the *Buddha* uttered this paean of joy (*udāna*), which vividly describes His transcendental moral victory and His inner spiritual experience.

Here, the *Buddha* acknowledges His past wanderings in *samsāra*, which entailed suffering (*dukkha*), a fact that clearly proves His belief in rebirth. He was compelled to wander and, consequently, to suffer, inasmuch as He could not discover the carpenter who built this house, the body (*kāya*). In His final birth, while engaged in solitary

<sup>69</sup> *Khuddaka Nikāya, Udāna.*

<sup>70</sup> This famous paean of joy only appears in the *Dhammapada*, XI, Old Age, verses 153—155.

<sup>71</sup> The “house” is the body, the “house-builder” is craving (*taṇhā*). “Seeking, but not finding,” means failing to attain Enlightenment.

<sup>72</sup> The Fruit of Arahatsip.

<sup>73</sup> These verses are the expressions (paeans) of the intense and sublime joy that the *Buddha* felt at the moment He attained Enlightenment. As such, they are replete with a wealth of sublime meaning and deep feeling. They are repeated here as Venerable Ānanda heard them from the mouth of the *Buddha* Himself.

meditation, which He had developed in the course of His wanderings, after a relentless search, He discovered the builder of the house, residing not outside but within the recesses of His own mind. It was craving (*taṇhā*), or attachment (*upādāna*), a self-creation, a mental element latent in all. How and when this craving originated is unknowable, but, what is created by oneself, can be destroyed by oneself. The discovery of the builder of the house is the eradication of craving by attaining Arahantship, which, in these verses, is alluded to as “the end of craving.”

The rafters of this self-created house are the defilements (*kilesa*), such as: (1) greed (*lobha*), or attachment; (2) hatred, or aversion (*dosa*); (3) delusion (*moha*); (4) conceit (*māna*); (5) false views (*diṭṭhi*, or *micchā-diṭṭhi*); (6) skeptical doubt (*vicikicchā*); (7) lethargy, depression, drowsiness (*thīna*); (8) restlessness, worry, agitation (*uddhacca*); (9) moral shamelessness (*ahirika*); and (10) lack of moral dread, or unconscientiousness (*anottappa*). The ridgepole that supports the rafters represents ignorance (*avijjā*), the root cause of all defilements. The shattering of the ridgepole of ignorance by wisdom (*paññā*) results in the complete demolition of the house. The ridgepole and rafters are the material with which the carpenter builds this undesired house. With their destruction, the carpenter is deprived of the material to rebuild the undesired house.

With the demolition of the house, the mind, for which there is no place in the analogy, attains the unconditioned state, which is *nibbāna*. Whatever is mundane is left behind, and only the Supramundane State, *nibbāna*, remains. ■

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## The Invitation to Expound the Dhamma

*“Those who imbibe the Dhamma live in joy with a serene mind. The wise take delight in the Dhamma expounded by the Noble Ones.”<sup>74</sup>*

### The Dhamma as the Teacher

On one occasion soon after His Enlightenment, the *Buddha* was dwelling at the foot of the Ajapāla banyan tree on the bank of the Nerañjarā river. While He was engaged in solitary meditation, the following thought arose in His mind:

*“Painful, indeed, is it to live without someone to pay reverence to and to show deference to. What if I should live near an ascetic or Brahmin respecting and showing reverence to him.”<sup>75</sup>*

Then it occurred to Him:

*“Should I live near another ascetic or Brahmin, respecting and paying reverence to him, in order to bring morality to perfection? But I do not see in this world, including gods, māras, and brahmās, and among beings, including ascetics, Brahmins, gods, and men, another ascetic or Brahmin who is superior to me in morality and with whom I could associate, respecting and paying reverence to him.*

*“Should I live near another ascetic or Brahmin, respecting and paying reverence to him, in order to bring concentration to perfection? But I do not see in this world any ascetic or Brahmin who is superior to me in concentration and with whom I could associate, respecting and paying reverence to him.*

*“Should I live near another ascetic or Brahmin, respecting and paying reverence to him, in order to bring wisdom to perfection? But I do not see in this world any ascetic or Brahmin who is superior to me in wisdom and with whom I could associate, respecting and paying reverence to him.*

*“Should I live near another ascetic or Brahmin, respecting and paying reverence to him, in order to bring emancipation to perfection? But I do not see*

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<sup>74</sup> *Dhammapada*, VI, The Wise, verse 79.

<sup>75</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya*, part II.

*in this world any ascetic or Brahmin who is superior to me in emancipation and with whom I could associate, respecting and paying reverence to him.”*

Then, the thought occurred to Him:

*“What if I should live respecting and paying reverence to this very Dhamma that I have myself realized?”*

Thereupon, Brahmā Sahampati, understanding with his own mind the *Buddha’s* thought, just as a strong man would stretch his bent arm or bend his stretched arm, even so did he vanish from the *brahmā* realm and appear before the *Buddha*. Thereupon, covering one shoulder with his upper robe and placing his right knee on the ground, he saluted the *Buddha* with clasped hands and said thus:

*“It is so, O Exalted One! It is so, O Accomplished One! O Lord, the worthy, fully Enlightened Ones who were in the past did, indeed, live respecting and paying reverence to this very Dhamma. The worthy, fully Enlightened Ones who will live in the future will also live respecting and paying reverence to this very Dhamma. O Lord, may the Exalted One, the worthy, supremely Enlightened One of the present age also live respecting and paying reverence to this very Dhamma.”*

The Brahmā Sahampati continued:

*“Those Enlightened Ones of the past, those of the future, and those of the present age, who dispel the suffering of the many, all of them lived, will live, and are living respecting the noble Dhamma. This is the characteristic of the Buddhas. Therefore, he who desires his welfare and expects his greatness should certainly respect the noble Dhamma, remembering the message of the Buddhas.”*

This is what the Brahmā Sahampati said, after which he respectfully saluted the *Buddha* and, passing around Him to the right, disappeared immediately.

Inasmuch as the *Sangha* is also endowed with greatness, the *Buddha* also paid reverence to the *Sangha*.<sup>76</sup>

### **The Invitation to Expound the Dhamma**

From the foot of the Rājāyatana tree, the *Buddha* proceeded to the Ajapāla banyan tree, and, while He was absorbed in solitary meditation, the following thought occurred to Him:

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<sup>76</sup> This discourse was delivered by the *Buddha* while residing at Jetavana (the grove [*vana*] of Prince Jeta, which Anāthapiṇḍika had bought for the use of the *Buddha* and His disciples), Sāvattihī, long after the Order of the *Sangha* had been established. He showed His reverence toward the *Sangha* by requesting Queen Mahā Pajāpati Gotamī to offer the robe specially prepared for Him.

*“This Dhamma that I have realized is indeed profound, difficult to perceive, difficult to comprehend, tranquil, exalted, not within the sphere of logic, subtle, and is to be understood only by the wise. These beings are attached to material pleasures. This causally connected ‘Dependent Origination’ is a subject that is difficult to comprehend. And this nibbāna — the cessation of the conditioned, the abandoning of all defilements, the destruction of craving, the non-attachment, and the cessation — is also not an easy matter to comprehend. If I, too, were to teach this Dhamma, no one would understand me. That would be wearisome to me, that would be tiresome to me.”*

Then, these wonderful verses, not heard before, occurred to the *Buddha*:

*“With difficulty have I comprehended the Dhamma. There is no need to proclaim it now. This Dhamma is not easy to understand by those who are dominated by lust and hatred. Those who are lust-ridden, shrouded in darkness, do not see this Dhamma, which goes against the stream, which is abstruse, profound, difficult to perceive, and subtle.”*

As the *Buddha* reflected thus, He was not disposed to expound the *Dhamma*. Thereupon, Brahmā Sahampati read the thoughts of the *Buddha*, and, fearing that the world might perish through not hearing the *Dhamma*, approached Him and invited Him to teach the *Dhamma*, thus:

*“O Lord, may the Exalted One expound the Dhamma! May the Accomplished One expound the Dhamma! There are beings with little dust in their eyes, who, not hearing the Dhamma, will perish. There are those who will understand the Dhamma.”*

Furthermore, he remarked:

*“In ancient times, there arose in Magadha a Dhamma that was impure, thought out by the corrupted. Open this door to the Deathless State. May they now hear the Dhamma understood by the Stainless One! Just as one standing on the summit of a rocky mountain would behold the people around, even so may the All-Seeing, Wise One ascend to the palace of the Dhamma! May the Sorrowless One behold the people who are plunged in grief and are overcome by birth and decay!”*

When he said so, the Exalted One spoke to him thus:

*“The following thought, O Brahmā, occurred to me: ‘This Dhamma that I have comprehended is not easy to understand by those who are dominated by lust and hatred. Those who are lust-ridden, shrouded in darkness, do not see this*

*Dhamma, which goes against the stream, which is abstruse, profound, difficult to perceive, and subtle.’ As I reflected thus, my mind turned to inaction and not to the teaching of the Dhamma.”*

Brahmā Sahampati appealed to the *Buddha* for a second time, and the *Buddha* gave the same reply.

When he appealed to the *Buddha* for the third time, the Exalted One, out of pity for beings, surveyed the world with His *Buddha*-Vision. As He surveyed thus, He saw beings with little and much dust in their eyes, with keen and dull intellect, with good and bad characteristics, beings who are easy and beings who are difficult to teach, and a few others who, with fear, view evil and a life beyond.

*“As in the case of a blue, red, or white lotus pond, some lotuses are born in the water, grow in the water, remain immersed in the water, and thrive plunged in the water; some are born in the water, grow in the water, and remain on the surface of the water; some others are born in the water, grow in the water, and remain emerging out of the water, unstained by the water. Even so, as the Exalted One surveyed the world with His Buddha-Vision, He saw beings with little and much dust in their eyes, with keen and dull intellect, with good and bad characteristics, beings who are easy and beings who are difficult to teach, and a few others who, with fear, view evil and a life beyond.”*

Thereupon, He addressed the Brahmā Sahampati in a verse, thus:

*“The doors to the Deathless State are open to them. Let those who have ears repose in confidence. Being aware of the weariness, O Brahmā, I did not teach this glorious and excellent Dhamma among men.”*

The delighted Brahmā, thinking that he had made the occasion for the Exalted One to expound the *Dhamma*, respectfully saluted Him and, passing around Him to the right, immediately disappeared.<sup>77</sup>

### **The First Two Converts**

After His memorable fast of forty-nine days, as the *Buddha* sat under the Rājāyatana tree, two merchants, Tapassu and Bhallika, from Ukkala (Orissa), happened to pass that way. Then, a certain deity,<sup>78</sup> who was a blood-relative of theirs in a past birth, spoke to them as follows:

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<sup>77</sup> See *Majjhima Nikāya*, Ariyapariyesana Sutta, no. 26.

<sup>78</sup> Pāli *devatā*. *Devatās* are terrestrial or celestial deities, a class of beings who, as a rule, are invisible to humans. This particular feminine deity had been related to the merchants in a previous birth. It is

*“The Exalted One, good sirs, is dwelling at the foot of the Rājāyatana tree, having just attained Enlightenment. Go and serve the Exalted One with rice cake and honey-comb.<sup>79</sup> It will lead to your well-being and happiness for a long time.”*

Availing themselves of this golden opportunity, the two delighted merchants went to the Exalted One, bearing rice cake and honey-comb. Then, respectfully saluting Him, they implored Him to accept their humble alms so that it might lead to their happiness and well-being.

Thereupon, it occurred to the Exalted One:

*“The Tathāgatas do not accept food with their hands. How shall I accept this rice cake and honey-comb?”*

Forthwith, the four Great Kings<sup>80</sup> understood the thoughts of the Exalted One with their minds and, from the four directions, offered Him four granite bowls<sup>81</sup> saying: “O Lord, may the Exalted One accept herewith this rice cake and honey-comb.”

The *Buddha* graciously accepted this timely gift, with which He received the humble offering of the merchants and ate this food after His long fast.

After the meal was over, the merchants prostrated themselves before the feet of the *Buddha* and said:

*“We, O Lord, seek refuge in the Exalted One and the Dhamma. May the Exalted One count us as lay disciples who have gone to Him for refuge from today onward, for as long as life lasts.”<sup>82</sup>*

These were the first lay disciples of the *Buddha*,<sup>83</sup> who embraced Buddhism by seeking refuge in the *Buddha* and the *Dhamma*, reciting the twofold formula.

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interesting to note the non-human element appearing in various places connected with the life of the *Buddha*.

<sup>79</sup> *Sattu*, “fried flour; rice cake,” and *madhu*, “honey(-comb),” were a regular diet of travelers in India in ancient times.

<sup>80</sup> *Cātummahārājikas*, the Guardian Deities of the four quarters (*catuddisā*). They inhabit the lowest of the six celestial realms (*cātummahārājiko devaloko*).

<sup>81</sup> The Commentary states that the *Buddha* wished that the four bowls be combined into one.

<sup>82</sup> *Buddhaṃ saranāṃ gacchāmi* “I go to the *Buddha* for refuge,” *Dhammaṃ saranāṃ gacchāmi* “I go to the *Dhamma* for refuge,” is the twofold formula. Since the *Sangha*, or Noble Order, had not yet been established, the merchants did not recite the third formula — *Sanghaṃ saranāṃ gacchāmi* “I go to the *Sangha* for refuge.” One becomes a Buddhist by intelligently reciting the Three Refuges.

<sup>83</sup> The *Jātaka* Commentary states that, when these two first converts begged the *Buddha* to give them an object of worship, the *Buddha* touched His head and gave them some hair relics. It is believed that these relics have been enshrined in the modern Shwe Dagon Pagoda in Rangoon, Burma (Myanmar), the pride and glory of Burmese Buddhists. This massive, bell-shaped *Cetiya* appears like a golden mountain from a distance.



## On the Way to Benares to Teach the Dhamma

On accepting the invitation to teach the *Dhamma*, the first thought that occurred to the *Buddha* before He embarked on His great mission was:

*“To whom shall I teach the Dhamma first? Who will understand the Dhamma quickly? Well, there is Ālāra Kālāma,<sup>84</sup> who is learned, clever, wise, and has, for long, been with little dust in his eyes. What if I were to teach the Dhamma to him first? He will understand the Dhamma quickly.”*

Then, a deity appeared before the *Buddha* and said: “Lord! Ālāra Kālāma died a week ago.” With His supernormal vision, the *Buddha* perceived that it was so. Then He thought of Uddaka Rāmaputta.<sup>85</sup> Instantly, a deity informed Him that Uddaka Rāmaputta had died the evening before. With His supernormal vision, the *Buddha* perceived that it was so.

Ultimately, the *Buddha* thought of the five energetic ascetics who had attended on Him during His struggle for Enlightenment. With His supernormal vision, He perceived that they were residing in the Deer Park at Isipatana near Benares. So, the *Buddha* stayed at Uruvelā till such time as He was ready to set out for Benares.

While the *Buddha* was traveling from Uruvelā to Benares, a wandering ascetic named Upaka saw Him and asked:

*“Your senses are extremely clear, O friend! Your complexion is pure and clean! On whose account has your renunciation been made, friend? Who is your teacher? Whose doctrine do you profess?”*

The *Buddha* replied:

*“All have I overcome, all do I know. From all am I detached, all have I renounced. Wholly absorbed am I in the destruction of craving [Arahantship]. Having comprehended all by myself, whom shall I call my teacher? I have no teacher.<sup>86</sup> There is no one who is my equal. In this world, including gods, there is no one who can rival me. Indeed, I am an Arahant in this world. I am an unsurpassed teacher; alone am I the Fully Enlightened One. I am cool and appeased. I go to the city of Kāsi to establish the wheel of Dhamma. In this blind world, I shall beat the drum of Deathlessness.”*

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<sup>84</sup> Ālāra Kālāma was His first religious teacher, who taught the Ascetic Gotama the *jhānas* up to the Realm of Nothingness (*akiñcaññāyatana*).

<sup>85</sup> Uddaka Rāmaputta was His second teacher, who taught the Ascetic Gotama the highest state of mundane mental development, The Realm of Neither Perception nor Non-perception (*n’eva saññā n’āsaññāyatana*).

<sup>86</sup> The *Buddha* uttered these words because He attained Enlightenment without the aid of a teacher. He had teachers before His Enlightenment, but nobody taught Him the way to attain Buddhahood. It is, therefore, not correct to say that Buddhism is a natural outgrowth of Hinduism.

Upaka then asked:

*“Then, friend, do you admit that you are an Arahant, a limitless Conqueror?”*

To which the *Buddha* replied:

*“Like me are conquerors who have achieved the destruction of defilements. I have conquered all the evil conditions. Hence, Upaka, I am called a Conqueror.”*

“It may be so, friend,” Upaka curtly remarked, and, nodding his head, turned onto a by-road and departed.

Unperturbed by this first rebuff, the *Buddha* journeyed from place to place and, in due course, arrived at the Deer Park at Isipatana near Benares.

### **Meeting the Five Ascetics**

The five ascetics saw the *Buddha* coming from afar and decided not to pay Him due respect, since they misconstrued His discontinuance of rigid ascetic practices, which had proved utterly futile during His struggle for Enlightenment. They remarked among themselves:

*“Friends, that Ascetic Gotama is coming. He is luxurious. He has given up striving and has turned to a life of abundance. He should not be greeted and waited upon. His bowl and robe should not be taken. Nevertheless, a seat should be prepared. If He wishes, let Him sit down.”*

However, as the *Buddha* continued to come closer, His august personality was such that they felt compelled to receive Him with due honor. One of them came forward and took His bowl and robe, another prepared a seat, and yet another kept water for His feet. Nevertheless, they addressed Him by name and called Him “friend” (*āvuso*), a form of address applied generally to juniors and equals. Thereupon, the *Buddha* addressed them thus:

*“Do not, O Bhikkhus, address the Tathāgata by name or by the title ‘āvuso.’ An Exalted One, O Bhikkhus, is the Tathāgata. A Fully Enlightened One is He. Listen carefully, O Bhikkhus! Deathlessness has been attained. I shall instruct and teach the Dhamma. If you act according to my instructions, before long, you will realize, by your own intuitive wisdom, and live, attaining in this life itself, that supreme consummation of the Holy Life, for the sake of which sons of noble families rightly leave the household life for homelessness.”*

Thereupon, the five ascetics replied:

*“By that demeanor of yours, āvuso Gotama, by that discipline, by those painful austerities, you did not attain to any superhuman specific knowledge and insight worthy of a Noble One. How is it that you could gain any such superhuman specific knowledge and insight worthy of a Noble One when you have become luxurious and have turned to a life of abundance?”*

In explanation, the *Buddha* answered:

*“The Tathāgata, O Bhikkhus, is not luxurious, has not given up striving, and has not turned to a life of abundance. The Tathāgata is an Exalted One. He is a Fully Enlightened One. Listen carefully, O Bhikkhus! Deathlessness has been attained. I shall instruct and teach the Dhamma. If you act according to my instructions, before long, you will realize, by your own intuitive wisdom, and live, attaining in this life itself, that supreme consummation of the Holy Life for the sake of which sons of noble families rightly leave the household life for homelessness.”*

For a second time, the close-minded ascetics expressed their disappointment in the same manner. For a second time, the *Buddha* reassured them of His attainment of Enlightenment. When the adamant ascetics expressed their refusal to believe Him for a third time, the *Buddha* questioned them thus: “Do you know, O *Bhikkhus*, when I ever spoke to you in this way before?” “Nay, indeed, Lord,” they replied.

The *Buddha* then repeated, once again, that He had gained Enlightenment and that they also could realize the Truth if they would act according to His instructions.

It was indeed a frank utterance, issuing from the sacred lips of the *Buddha*. The cultured ascetics, though adamant in their views, were, thereupon, fully convinced of the great achievement of the *Buddha* and of His competence to act as their moral guide and teacher. They believed His word and sat in silence to listen to His noble teaching.

The *Buddha* instructed two of the ascetics, while the remaining three went out for alms. With what the three ascetics brought back from their alms-round, all six maintained themselves. Then, the *Buddha* instructed the other three ascetics, while two went out for alms. With what the two brought back, all six maintained themselves.

And, before long, those five ascetics, thus admonished and instructed by the *Buddha*, being themselves subject to birth, decay, disease, death, sorrow, and defilements, realized the true nature of life and, seeking out the birthless, decayless, diseaseless, deathless, sorrowless, defilementless, incomparable Supreme Peace, *nibbāna*, attained the incomparable security, *nibbāna*, which is free from birth, decay, disease, death, sorrow, and defilements. The knowledge arose in them that their Deliverance was unshakable, that it was their last birth, and that there would be no more of this state again.

The Dhammacakkavattana Sutta,<sup>87</sup> which deals with the Four Noble Truths, was the first discourse delivered by the *Buddha* to the five ascetics. Hearing it,

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<sup>87</sup> This *sutta* is discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

Konḍañña, the eldest, attained the first stage of Sainthood (*Sotāpanna*<sup>88</sup>). After receiving further instruction, the other four attained *Sotāpanna* later. On hearing the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta*,<sup>89</sup> which deals with soullessness, all five attained Arahantship,<sup>90</sup> the final stage of Sainthood.

### The First Five Disciples

The five learned ascetics, who thus attained Arahantship and became the *Buddha*'s first ordained disciples, were Konḍañña, Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahānāma, and Assaji — all belonged to the Brahmin Caste.

Konḍañña was the youngest and the most clever of the eight Brahmins who were summoned by King Suddhodana to the naming ceremony for the infant prince. The remaining four were sons of the other Brahmins. All five of them retired to the forest as ascetics in anticipation, while the *Bodhisatta* was striving to attain Buddhahood. When He gave up His useless penances and severe austerities and began to nourish His body sparingly to regain His lost strength, these favorite followers, disappointed at the change of method, deserted Him and went to Isipatana. Soon after their departure, the *Bodhisatta* attained Buddhahood.

The venerable Konḍañña became the first Arahant and the most senior member of the *Sangha*. It was Assaji, one of the five, who converted the great Sāriputta, the chief disciple of the *Buddha*. ■

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<sup>88</sup> Literally, "Stream-Winner."

<sup>89</sup> This was the second discourse delivered by the *Buddha* after attaining Enlightenment. See Chapter 6.

<sup>90</sup> *Arahant* means "Foe-Destroyer," "Worthy One."



# 6

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## Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: The First Discourse

*“Of paths, the Eightfold<sup>91</sup> is the best; of truths, the Noble Four<sup>92</sup> are best; of mental states, detachment<sup>93</sup> is the best; of human beings, the All-Seeing One is best.”<sup>94 95</sup>*

### Introduction

When Prince Siddhattha was born, Indian civilization was already old. Perhaps fifteen hundred years (or more) had passed since wandering Aryan tribes from Central Asia, entering the Indian subcontinent along the Indus River, had found a civilization already a thousand years old,<sup>96</sup> in which the defining features of the Hindu faith seem to have already been established.

The Aryans brought with them a social order presided over by priests, or Brahmins, the trustees of ancient hymns, rituals, and deities related to those of other lands, especially Persia (modern-day Iran), where Aryan tribes had also spread. India seems to have dealt with this new religion as it has dealt with cultural imports ever since — it absorbed the new into the old. As a result, in even the earliest of the Indian scriptures — the Rig Veda, whose oldest hymns go back at least to 1500 BCE —, we find Aryan nature gods integrated with the loftiest conceptions of mysticism. There is no inconsistency in this integration, only a very early recognition that life’s supreme reality can be described in many ways. “Truth is one,” says a hymn of the Rig Veda; “the wise call it by different names.”

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<sup>91</sup> The Noble Eightfold Path consists of: (1) Right Understanding; (2) Right Intentions (or Right Thought); (3) Right Speech; (4) Right Action; (5) Right Livelihood; (6) Right Effort; (7) Right Mindfulness; and (8) Right Concentration.

<sup>92</sup> The Four Noble Truths are (1) Suffering (*dukkha*); (2) the Origin of Suffering (*samudaya*); (3) the Cessation of Suffering (*nirodha*); and (4) the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering (*magga*), which is the Noble Eightfold Path. For more information, cf. Chapter 19.

<sup>93</sup> *Virāga* “detachment, non-attachment” = *nibbāna*.

<sup>94</sup> *Cakkhumā* “All-Seeing One” = the *Buddha*.

<sup>95</sup> *Dhammapada*, XX, The Path, verse 273.

<sup>96</sup> The oldest Indian civilization — the co-called “Indus Valley” or “Harappan” Civilization — flourished from about 2500 BCE to 1700 BCE, though its beginnings go back even further.

From the beginning, then, two subcurrents ran through the broad river of the Vedic faith. One, followed by the vast majority of people, was the social religion of the Vedas, with Brahmins in charge of preserving the ancient scriptures and presiding over a complex set of rituals. But another tradition, at least as ancient, taught that, beyond ritual and the mediation of priests, it is possible, through the practice of spiritual disciplines, to realize directly the divine ground of life. This ideal is sanctioned in Vedic religion as the human being's highest vocation. The opportunity is open to anyone to wrap up social obligations and retire to an ashram in the Himalayas or in the forests flanking the Ganges to learn from an illumined teacher how to realize truth. This choice is often misunderstood as world-weariness, and we know that, even in those most ancient times, India had ascetics who tortured their bodies in the desire to free their spirit. But this is not India's classical tradition, and the typical ashram of the times was a retreat where students would live with an illumined teacher as one of his followers, leading a life of outward simplicity in order to concentrate on inner growth.

Sometimes, graduates of these forest academies would go on to become teachers themselves. But it was at least as likely that they would return to society, disciplined in body and mind, to make a contribution to some secular field. Some, according to legend, became counselors of kings; one actually was a king. These men and women turned inward for the same reason that scientists and adventurers turn outward — not to run from life, but to master it. They went into the forests of the Ganges to find the truth as a poet turns to poetry or a musician to music, because they loved life so intensely that nothing would do but to grasp it at the heart. They yearned to *know* — to know what the human being is, what life is, what death means and whether it can be conquered.

Oral records of their discoveries began to be collected around 1000 BCE or even earlier, in fragments called the *Upanishads*. Individualistic in their expression, yet completely universal, these ecstatic documents belong to no particular religion but to all mankind. They are not systematic philosophy; indeed, they are not philosophy at all. Each *Upanishad* contains the record of a *darśana*, literally, “something seen,” a view not of the world of everyday experience but of the deep, still realms beneath the sense-world, accessible in deep meditation.

Born in freedom and stamped with the joy of self-realization, these early testaments of the Vedic sages are clear predecessors of the *Buddha's* voice. They contain no trace of world denial, no shadow of fear, no sense of diffidence about our place in an alien universe. Far from deprecating physical existence, they teach that self-realization means health, vitality, long life, and a harmonious balance of inward and outward activity. With a triumphant voice, they proclaim that human destiny lies ultimately in human hands for those who master the passions of the mind.

And they insist on *knowing*, not the learning of facts but the direct experience of truth — the one reality underlying life's diversity. This is not an intellectual achievement. Knowledge means realization. To know the truth, one must make it real, must live it out in thought, word, and deed.

The method these sages followed in their pursuit of truth was called *brahmavidyā*, the “supreme science,” a discipline in which attention is focused intensely on the contents



of consciousness. In practice, this means meditation. The modern mind balks at calling meditation scientific, but, in these sages' passion for truth, in their search for reality as something that is the same under all conditions and from all points of view, in their insistence on direct observation and systematic empirical method, we find the essence of the scientific spirit. It is not improper to call *brahmavidyā* a series of experiments — on the mind, by the mind — with predictable, replicable results.

Yet, of course, the sages of the *Upanishads* took a different track from conventional science. They looked not at the world outside, but at human knowledge of the world inside. They sought invariants in the contents of consciousness and discarded everything impermanent as ultimately unreal, in the way that the sensations of a dream are seen to be unreal when one awakens. Their principle was “this is not the self; that is not the self.” They peeled away personality like an onion, layer by layer, and found nothing permanent in the mass of perceptions, thoughts, emotions, drives, and memories that we call “I,” “me,” or “mine.” Yet, when everything individual was stripped away, an intense awareness remained — consciousness itself. The sages called this ultimate ground of personality *ātman*, the “Self.”

The scientific temper of this method is a vital part of the *Buddha's* background. If, as Aldous Huxley observed, science is “the reduction of multiplicities to unities,” no civilization has been more scientific. From the Rig Veda on, India's scriptures are steeped in the conviction of an all-pervasive order (*ṛtam*) in the whole of creation that is reflected in each part. In medieval Europe, it was the realization that there cannot be one set of natural laws governing earth and another set governing the heavens that led to the birth of classical physics. In a similar insight, Vedic India conceived of the natural world — not only physical phenomena but human action and thought — as uniformly governed by universal law.<sup>97</sup>

As can be seen from the preceding description, ancient India was noted for its distinguished philosophers and religious teachers, who held diverse views regarding life and its goal. The names of some of these teachers, along with their views, are mentioned in the Pāli scriptures. The Brahmajāla Sutta<sup>98</sup> of the *Dīgha Nikāya* mentions sixty-two varieties of philosophical theories that were prevalent at the time of the *Buddha*.

<sup>97</sup> The beginning parts of this chapter are adapted from the Introduction to the *Dhammapada* by Eknath Easwaran (2nd edition: Petaluma, CA: Nilgiri Press [2007]).

<sup>98</sup> In the Brahmajāla Sutta (The Supreme Net — What the Teaching is Not), the *Bhikkhus* observe the ascetic Suppiya arguing with one of his pupils about the merits of the *Buddha*, His Teachings (*Dhamma*), and His Holy Order (*Sangha*). The *Buddha* tells the *Bhikkhus* not to be affected by either praise or criticism of His Teachings and declares that the “worldling” (*puthujjana*) will praise Him for superficial reasons and not for the essence of His Teachings. He then lists sixty-two different types of wrong view (*micchā-diṭṭhi* or simply *diṭṭhi*) prevalent at the time, all of which are based on contact of the six sense-bases and their objects. Contact conditions craving, which, in turn, leads to clinging, to (re)becoming, to birth, to ageing and death, and to all manner of suffering. But the *Tathāgata* (the *Buddha*) has gone beyond these things, and all sixty-two wrong views are trapped in His net. In the present age, wrong view would include any religious, philosophical, or political system that supports or promotes violence, ill will, or bigotry, in any form whatsoever, as well as any other corrupt, false, or evil doctrine (such as eternalism, nihilism, annihilationism, hedonism, etc.).

One extreme view, which was diametrically opposed to all current religious belief, was the nihilistic teaching of the materialists, who were called “*Cārvākas*” after the name of their founder.

According to the views of ancient materialism, which was known as *lokāyata* in Pāli and Sanskrit, man is annihilated after death, leaving behind whatever force was generated by him. In their opinion, death is the end of all. This present world alone is real. “Eat, drink, and be merry, for death comes to all,” appears to be the ideal of their system. “Virtue,” they say, “is a delusion, and enjoyment is the only reality. Religion is a foolish aberration, a mental disease. There was a distrust of everything good, high, pure and compassionate. Their theory stands for sensualism and selfishness and the gross affirmation of the loud will. There is no need to control passion and instinct, since they are nature’s legacy to men.”<sup>99</sup>

Another extreme view was that liberation was possible only by leading a life of strict asceticism. This was purely a religious doctrine, firmly held by ascetics of the highest order. The five ascetics who attended on the *Bodhisatta* during His struggle for Enlightenment tenaciously adhered to this belief. In accordance with this view, the *Buddha*, too, before His Enlightenment, subjected Himself to all forms of austerity. After an extraordinary struggle for six years, He realized the utter futility of self-mortification. Consequently, He changed this unsuccessful approach and adopted a middle way. His favorite disciples thus lost confidence in Him and deserted Him, saying: “The Ascetic Gotama has become luxurious, has ceased from striving, and has returned to a life of comfort.”

Their unexpected departure was definitely a material loss to Him, since they had ministered to all His needs. Nevertheless, He was not discouraged. The iron-willed *Bodhisatta* probably must have felt happy to be left alone. With unabated enthusiasm and with restored energy, He persistently strove until He attained Enlightenment, the goal of His life.

Precisely two months after His Enlightenment, on the *Āsālha* (July) full moon day, the *Buddha* delivered His first discourse to the five ascetics who had attended on Him.

### **The First Discourse of the Buddha**

“*Dhammacakka*” is the name given to the first discourse of the *Buddha*. It is frequently represented as meaning “The Wheel of Truth” or “The Wheel of Wisdom.” According to the commentators, *Dhamma* here means “wisdom” or “knowledge,” and *cakka* means “set rolling,” that is, “founding” or “establishment.”

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<sup>99</sup> Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888—1975), *Indian Philosophy* (two volumes, 1923—1927 [volume 1 reprinted 2008 by Oxford University Press]), vol. 1, pp. 281—282. Note: Radhakrishnan was a renowned scholar and statesman who served as Vice President of India from May 1952 through May 1962 and as President from May 1962 through May 1967.

*“The Perfect One, O Bhikkhus, the Holy One, the Fully Enlightened One, in the Deer Park at Isipatana near Benares, set rolling [established] the unsurpassed Wheel of the Truth.”*

*Dhammacakkappavattana* means “The Exposition of the Establishment of Wisdom.” *Dhamma* may also be interpreted as “Truth,” and *cakka* as “Wheel.” Thus, another way of interpreting *Dhammacakkappavattana* is “The Turning (or Establishment) of the Wheel of Truth.”

In this most important discourse, the *Buddha* expounds the Middle Path which He Himself discovered and which forms the essence of His Teaching. He opened the discourse by instructing the five monks, who believed in strict asceticism, to avoid the extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification, since neither of them leads to perfect Peace and Enlightenment. The former retards one’s spiritual progress, while the latter weakens one’s intellect. He criticized both these extremes, since He realized their futility through His own personal experience. In their place, He enunciated the most practical, rational, and beneficial path, which alone leads to perfect purity and absolute Liberation.

This discourse was expounded by the *Buddha* while He was residing in the Deer Park at Isipatana near Benares.

The intellectual five monks, who were closely associated with the *Buddha* for six years, were the only human beings who were present to hear the discourse. Books state that many invisible beings, such as *devas* and *brahmās*, also took advantage of the golden opportunity to listen to the discourse. Inasmuch as Buddhists believe in the existence of realms other than this world, inhabited by beings with subtle bodies invisible to the physical eye of man, it is, indeed, possible that many *devas* and *brahmās* were present on this great occasion. Nevertheless, it is clear that the *Buddha* was addressing the five monks and that the discourse was intended mainly for them.

At the outset, the *Buddha* cautioned them to avoid two extremes: “There are two extremes (*antā*) that should not be resorted to by a recluse (*pabbajitena*).” Special emphasis was placed on the two terms *antā*, which means “end” or “extreme,” and *pabbajitena*, which means “one who has renounced the world.”

One extreme, in the *Buddha*’s own words, is the constant attachment to sensory pleasures (*kāmasukhallikānuyoga*). The *Buddha* described this extreme as base, vulgar, worldly, ignoble, and profitless. This should not be misunderstood to mean that the *Buddha* expected all His followers to give up material pleasures and retire to a forest without enjoying this life. The *Buddha* was not so narrow-minded.

Whatever the deluded sensualist may feel about it, to the dispassionate thinker, the pursuit of sensory pleasures is distinctly short-lived, never completely satisfying, and results in unpleasant consequences. Speaking of worldly happiness, the *Buddha* says that the acquisition of wealth and the enjoyment of possessions are two sources of pleasure for laymen. An understanding recluse would not, however, seek delight in the pursuit of these fleeting pleasures. To the surprise of the average person, a recluse might shun them. What constitutes pleasure to the average person is a source of alarm to the recluse, to whom renunciation (*nekkhamma*) alone is pleasure.

The other extreme is the addiction to self-mortification (*attakilamathānuyoga*). Commenting on this extreme, which is not practiced by ordinary people, the *Buddha* remarks that it is painful, ignoble, and profitless. Unlike the first extreme, this one is not described as base, worldly, and vulgar. The exclusion of these three terms is very striking. As a rule, it is the sincere recluse, who has renounced his attachment to sensory pleasures, who resorts to this painful method, mainly with the goal of gaining liberation from the ills of life. The *Buddha*, who had painful experience with this profitless course, describes it as useless. It only increases suffering instead of diminishing it.

The *Buddhas* and *Arahants* are described as *Ariyas*, meaning “Noble Ones.” *Anariya* (ignoble) may therefore be considered as not characteristic of the *Buddha* and *Arahants*, who are free from passions. *Attha* means “the ultimate Good,” which, for the *Buddha*, is *nibbāna*, the complete liberation from suffering. Therefore, *anattasamhitā* may be construed as not conducive to ultimate Good.

The *Buddha* first cleared the issues and removed the false notions of His hearers. When their troubled minds became pliable and receptive, the *Buddha* related His personal experience regarding these two extremes.

The *Buddha* says that He (the *Tathāgata*), realizing the error of both these extremes, followed a middle path. This new path, or way, was discovered by Himself. The *Buddha* termed His new system *majjhimā paṭipadā*, the “Middle Way.” To persuade His followers to give heed to His new path, He spoke of its various benefits. Unlike the two diametrically opposite extremes, this Middle Path produces the spiritual insight and intellectual wisdom to see things as they truly are. When the insight is clarified and the intellect is sharpened, everything is seen in its true perspective.

Furthermore, unlike the first extreme, which stimulates passions, this Middle Way leads to the subjugation of passion, which results in Peace. Above all, it leads to the attainment of the four supramundane Paths of Sainthood,<sup>100</sup> to the understanding of the Four Noble Truths, and, finally, to the realization of the ultimate Goal, *nibbāna*.

Now, what is this Middle Way? The *Buddha* tells us that it is the Noble Eightfold Path. The eight factors are then enumerated in the discourse.

The first factor is Right Understanding, the keynote of Buddhism. The *Buddha* started with Right Understanding in order to clear the doubts of the monks and guide them on the right way. Right Understanding deals with the knowledge of oneself as one really is — it leads to Right Thoughts, of renunciation (*nekkhamma-saṃkappa*), free from craving (*taṇhā*), of good will (*avyāpāda-saṃkappa*), free from ill will (*vyāpāda*), and of harmlessness (*avihiṃsā-saṃkappa*), free from cruelty (*vihiṃsā*). Right Thoughts result in Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood, which perfect one’s morality (*sīla*). The sixth factor is Right Effort, which deals with the elimination of unwholesome mental states and the cultivation of wholesome mental states within oneself. This self-purification is best done by a careful introspection, for which Right Mindfulness, the seventh factor, is essential. Right Effort, combined with Right Mindfulness, produce

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<sup>100</sup> The four Paths, or Stages, of Sainthood are: (1) *Sotāpanna* (Stream-Winner); (2) *Sakadāgāmī* (Once-Returner); (3) *Anāgāmī* (Non-Returner); and (4) *Arahant* (Foe-Destroyer).

Right Concentration, or one-pointedness of the mind (*ekaggatā*), the eighth factor. A one-pointed mind resembles a polished mirror, where everything is clearly reflected with no distortion.

Prefacing the discourse with the two extremes and His newly-discovered Middle Way, the *Buddha* expounded the Four Noble Truths in detail.

*Sacca* is the Pāli term for “Truth,” which means “that which is.” Its Sanskrit equivalent is *satya*, which denotes an incontrovertible fact. The *Buddha* enunciates four such Truths, the foundations of His Teaching, which are associated with so-called “beings.” Hence, His doctrine is homocentric (anthropocentric), in contrast to theocentric religions. It is introverted (introspective) and not extroverted. Whether a *Buddha* arises or not, these Truths exist, and it is a *Buddha* who reveals them to the deluded world. They do not and cannot change with time, because they are Eternal Truths. The *Buddha* was not indebted to anyone for His realization of them, as He stated in this discourse: “With regard to things unheard before, there arose in me the eye, the knowledge, the wisdom, the insight, and the light.” These words are very significant, because they testify to the originality of His new Teaching. Hence, there is no justification in the statement that Buddhism is a natural outgrowth of Hinduism, although it is true that there are some fundamental doctrines common to both systems.

These truths are termed *ariya saccāni* (Noble Truths) in Pāli. They are so called because they were discovered by the Greatest *Ariya* (Noble One), that is, one who is far removed from all defilements.

The first Noble Truth (*dukkha-sacca*) deals with *dukkha*, which, for want of a better English equivalent, is inappropriately rendered by “suffering” or “sorrow.” As a feeling, *dukkha* means that which is difficult to endure. As an abstract truth, *dukkha* is used in the sense of “contemptible (*du-*) emptiness (*kha-*).” The world rests on suffering — hence, it is contemptible. It is devoid of any reality — hence, it is empty or void. *Dukkha* therefore means “contemptible void.”

Average men only see the surface. An *Ariya* (Noble One) sees things as they truly are. To an *Ariya*, all life is unsatisfactory, and he finds no real happiness in this world, which deceives mankind with illusory pleasures. Material happiness is merely the gratification of some desire.

All are subject to birth (*jāti*) and, consequently, to decay (*jarā*), disease (*vyādhi*), and, finally, death (*marāṇa*). No one is exempt from these four causes of suffering.

Not to have one’s wishes fulfilled is also suffering. As a rule, one does not wish to be associated with persons or things one dislikes, nor does one wish to be separated from persons or things one likes. Moreover, one’s cherished desires are not always gratified. At times, what one least expects or what one least desires are thrust on oneself. Such unexpected, unpleasant circumstances can become so intolerable and so painful that weak, ignorant people may be compelled to commit suicide, as if such an act would solve the problem.

Real happiness is found within and is not to be defined in terms of wealth, power, honors, or conquests. If such worldly possessions are forcibly or unjustly obtained, or are



misdirected or even viewed with attachment, they become a source of pain and sorrow for the possessors.

Normally, the enjoyment of sensory pleasures is the highest and only happiness for the average person. There is, no doubt, some momentary happiness in the anticipation, gratification, and remembrance of such fleeting material pleasures, but they are illusory and temporary. According to the *Buddha*, non-attachment (*virāgatā*), or the transcending of material pleasures, is the greater happiness.

In brief, this composite body (*pañcūpādānakkhandha*<sup>101</sup>) itself is a cause of suffering.

The second Noble Truth (*samudaya-sacca*) deals with the origin of suffering. It teaches that all suffering is rooted in selfish craving (*taṇhā*) and ignorance (*avijjā*).

There are three kinds of craving. The first is the grossest form of craving, which is attachment to all sensory pleasures (*kāmatāṇhā*). The second is craving for existence (*bhavataṇhā*). The third is craving for non-existence (*vibhavataṇhā*). According to the Commentaries, the last two kinds of craving are (1) attachment to sensory pleasures, with the belief of Eternalism (*sassatadiṭṭhi*), and (2) that which is connected with the belief of Nihilism (*ucchedadiṭṭhi*). *Bhavataṇhā* may also be interpreted as attachment to the Form Realms and *vibhavataṇhā* as attachment to the Formless Realms, since *rūparāga* and *arūparāga* are treated as two Fetters (*saṃyojana*).

This craving is a powerful mental force latent in everyone and is the chief cause of most of the ills of life. It is this craving, gross and subtle, that leads to repeated births in *saṃsāra* and that makes one cling to all forms of life.

The grossest forms of craving are weakened on attaining the second stage of Sainthood, *Sakadāgāmi*, and are eradicated on attaining the third stage, *Anāgāmi*. The subtle forms of craving are eradicated on attaining the fourth stage, *Arahant*.

Right Understanding of the First Noble Truth leads to the eradication (*pahātabba*) of craving. The Second Noble Truth thus deals with the mental attitude of the ordinary man towards the external objects of sense.

The Third Noble Truth teaches that there is a complete cessation of suffering, which is *nibbāna*, the ultimate goal of Buddhism. It can be achieved in this life itself by the total eradication of all forms of craving.

The First Truth of suffering (*dukkha*), which depends on this so-called “being” and various aspects of life, is to be carefully perceived and examined (*pariññeyya*). This examination leads to a proper understanding of oneself as one really is.

The cause of suffering is craving (*taṇhā*), or attachment. This is the Second Noble Truth. As the *Dhammapada* (XVI, Affections, verse 216) states:

“Craving brings grief; craving brings fear. For those who are free from craving, there is neither grief nor fear.”

<sup>101</sup> That is, the five “aggregates of clinging” (also known as the five “aggregates of existence”): (1) bodily form (*rūpakkhandha*); (2) feeling (*vedanākkhandha*); (3) perception (*saññākkhandha*); (4) predisposing mental formations (*saṅkhārakkhandha*); and (5) discriminative consciousness (*viññāṇakkhandha*).

Craving, the *Buddha* says, leads to repeated births (*panobhavikā*). The Pāli term *panobhavikā* is noteworthy, since there are some scholars who maintain that the *Buddha* did not teach the doctrine of rebirth. The Second Noble Truth indirectly deals with past, present, and future births.

The Third Noble Truth has to be realized by developing (*bhāvetabba*) the Noble Eightfold Path (*Ariya Aṭṭhangika Magga*). This unique Eightfold Path is the only way to reach *nibbāna*. This is the Fourth Noble Truth.

Expounding the Four Noble Truths in various ways, the *Buddha* concluded the discourse with the powerful words:

*“As long, O Bhikkhus, as the absolute true intuitive knowledge regarding these Four Noble Truths, under their three aspects and twelve modes, was not perfectly clear to me, so long did I not acknowledge, in this world, inclusive of gods, māras, and brahmās and among the hosts of ascetics and priests, gods and men, that I had gained the incomparable Supreme Enlightenment.*

*“When the absolute true intuitive knowledge regarding these Truths, under their three aspects and twelve modes, became perfectly clear to me, then only did I acknowledge, in this world, inclusive of gods, māras, and brahmās and among the hosts of ascetics and priests, gods and men, that I had gained the incomparable Supreme Enlightenment (Anuttara Sammā-Sambodhi).*

*“And there arose in me the knowledge and insight: ‘Unshakable is the deliverance of my mind, this is my last birth, and, now, there is no existence again’.”*

At the end of the discourse, Koṇḍañña, the senior of the five disciples, realized that whatever is subject to origination is also subject to cessation and, thereupon, attained the first stage of Sainthood (*Sotāpanna*).

When the *Buddha* expounded the discourse of the *Dhammacakka*, the earth-bound deities exclaimed:

*“This excellent Dhammacakka, which could not be expounded by any ascetic, priest, god, māra, or brahmā in this world, has been expounded by the Exalted One in the Deer Park at Isipatana near Benares.”*

Hearing this, *devas* and *brahmās* of all the other planes also raised the same joyous cry. A radiant light, surpassing the effulgence of the gods, appeared in the world. The light of the *Dhamma* illuminated the whole world and brought peace and happiness to all beings.



THE FIRST DISCOURSE OF THE BUDDHA<sup>102</sup>

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## Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta

*Thus have I heard.*

*On one occasion, the Exalted One was residing in the Deer Park at Isipatana near Benares.<sup>103</sup> Thereupon, the Exalted One addressed the group of five Bhikkhus as follows:*

### THE TWO EXTREMES

*“There are these two extremes, O Bhikkhus, which should be avoided by one who has renounced the world: indulgence in sensory pleasures — this is base, vulgar, worldly, ignoble, and profitless — and addiction to self-mortification — this is painful, ignoble, and profitless.*

### THE MIDDLE PATH

*“Abandoning both these extremes, the Tathāgata<sup>104</sup> has comprehended the Middle Path, which promotes seeing and knowledge and which tends to peace, higher wisdom, enlightenment, and nibbāna.*

*“What, O Bhikkhus, is that Middle Path comprehended by the Tathāgata which promotes seeing and knowledge and which tends to peace, higher wisdom, enlightenment, and nibbāna?*

*“It is, indeed, that Noble Eightfold Path, namely, Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.*

*“This, O Bhikkhus, is the Middle Path comprehended by the Tathāgata.*

### THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

*“Now this, O Bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth as to Suffering: Birth [earthly existence], indeed, is suffering; old age is suffering; sickness is suffering; death is suffering; likewise sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. To be conjoined*

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<sup>102</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, Mahāvagga, Sacca Saṃyutta (Connected Discourses on the Truths). For an excellent presentation of the Four Noble Truths, cf. Rewata Dhamma, *The First Discourse of the Buddha* (Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications [1997]).

<sup>103</sup> Modern Saranath, where, in a former existence, the Master sacrificed His life to save a helpless doe and her unborn little one. The locality takes its modern name from the *Bodhisatta*, who, in that ancient birth, was called Sāraṅgaṇātha “protector of the deer.”

<sup>104</sup> Literally, “He who has thus come, He who has thus gone.” The *Buddha* usually used this term when He referred to Himself.

*with what one dislikes is suffering, to be separated from what one likes is suffering, not to get what one wants is suffering. In brief, the five aggregates of clinging are suffering.*

*“And again, O Bhikkhus, this is the Noble Truth as to the Cause of Suffering: It is that craving, associated with enjoyment and desire and seeking pleasure everywhere, which produces separate existence and leads to future births, and which keeps lingering on and on, that is the cause of suffering. In other words, it is craving for sense-pleasure, the desire for birth in a world of separateness, and the desire for existence to end.*

*“And this, O Bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth as to the Cessation of Suffering: It is the complete cessation, giving up, abandoning of craving; it is release and detachment from craving.*

*“And this, once again, O Bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth as to the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering: It is, indeed, that Noble Eightfold Path: Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration. The Middle Path, O Bhikkhus, leads to nibbāna.*

#### THE TWELVE ASPECTS OF WISDOM

*“This is the Noble Path as to Suffering. Thus, O Bhikkhus, with respect to things unheard before, there arose in me the seeing, the knowledge, the wisdom, the insight, and the light.*

*“This Noble Path of Suffering should be perceived. Thus, O Bhikkhus, with respect to things unheard before, there arose in me the seeing, the knowledge, the wisdom, the insight, and the light.*

*“This Noble Path of Suffering has been perceived. Thus, O Bhikkhus, with respect to things unheard before, there arose in me the seeing, the knowledge, the wisdom, the insight, and the light.*

*“This is the Noble Truth as to the Cause of Suffering. Thus, O Bhikkhus, with respect to things unheard before, there arose in me the seeing, the knowledge, the wisdom, the insight, and the light.*

*“This Noble Truth as to the Cause of Suffering should be eradicated. Thus, O Bhikkhus, with respect to things unheard before, there arose in me the seeing, the knowledge, the wisdom, the insight, and the light.*

*“This Noble Truth as to the Cause of Suffering has been eradicated. Thus, O Bhikkhus, with respect to things unheard before, there arose in me the seeing, the knowledge, the wisdom, the insight, and the light.*

*“This is the Noble Truth as to the Cessation of Suffering. Thus, O Bhikkhus, with respect to things unheard before, there arose in me the seeing, the knowledge, the wisdom, the insight, and the light.*

*“This Noble Truth as to the Cessation of Suffering should be realized. Thus, O Bhikkhus, with respect to things unheard before, there arose in me the seeing, the knowledge, the wisdom, the insight, and the light.*

*“This Noble Truth as to the Cessation of Suffering has been realized. Thus, O Bhikkhus, with respect to things unheard before, there arose in me the seeing, the knowledge, the wisdom, the insight, and the light.*

*“This is the Noble Truth as to the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering. Thus, O Bhikkhus, with respect to things unheard before, there arose in me the seeing, the knowledge, the wisdom, the insight, and the light.*

*“This Noble Truth as to the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering should be developed. Thus, O Bhikkhus, with respect to things unheard before, there arose in me the seeing, the knowledge, the wisdom, the insight, and the light.*

*“This Noble Truth as to the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering has been developed. Thus, O Bhikkhus, with respect to things unheard before, there arose in me the seeing, the knowledge, the wisdom, the insight, and the light.*

#### ENLIGHTENMENT NOT YET GAINED

*“As long, O Bhikkhus, as the absolute true intuitive knowledge regarding these Four Noble Truths, under their three aspects<sup>105</sup> and twelve modes,<sup>106</sup> was not perfectly clear to me, so long did I not acknowledge, in this world, inclusive of gods, māras, and brahmās and among the hosts of ascetics and priests, gods and men, that I had gained the incomparable Supreme Enlightenment.*

#### ENLIGHTENMENT GAINED

*“When the absolute true intuitive knowledge regarding these Truths, under their three aspects and twelve modes, became perfectly clear to me, then only did I acknowledge, in this world, inclusive of gods, māras, and brahmās and among the hosts of ascetics and priests, gods and men, that I had gained the incomparable Supreme Enlightenment.*

*“And there arose in me the knowledge and insight: ‘Unshakable is the deliverance of my mind,<sup>107</sup> this is my last birth, and, now, there is no existence again’.”*

#### AFTERMATH

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<sup>105</sup> They are: (1) the knowledge of the Four Noble Truths (*saccañāṇa*); (2) the knowledge regarding the respective functions of the Four Noble Truths (*kiccañāṇa*); and (3) the knowledge that the respective function of each Truth has been accomplished (*katañāṇa*).

<sup>106</sup> Each Truth consists of three aspects (these are listed in footnote 106 above). Thus, four Truths consist of twelve modes.

<sup>107</sup> The reference is to the Fruit of Arahantship.

*Thus did the Exalted One expound, and the delighted Bhikkhus applauded the words of the Exalted One.*

*When the doctrine was being expounded, the dustless, stainless, Truth-seeing eye<sup>108</sup> arose in Venerable Koṇḍañña, and he saw that “whatever is subject to origination is also subject to cessation.”*

*When the Buddha expounded the discourse of the Dhammacakka, the earth-bound deities exclaimed: “This excellent Dhammacakka, which could not be expounded by any ascetic, priest, god, māra, or brahmā in this world, has been expounded by the Exalted One in the Deer Park at Isipatana near Benares.”*

*Hearing this, the devas<sup>109</sup> of Cātummahārājika, Tāvātimsā, Yāmā, Tusitā, Nimmānarati, Paranimmitavasavatti, and the brahmās of Brahmā Pārisajja, Brahmā Purohita, Mahā Brahmā, Parittābhā, Appamāṇābhā, Ābhassarā, Parittasubhā, Appamāṇasubhā, Subhakiṇṇā, Vehapphalā, Avihā, Atappā, Sudassā, Sudassī, and Akaniṭṭhā, also raised the same joyous cry.*

*Thus, at that very moment, at that very instant, this cry extended as far as the brahma-realm. These ten thousand world systems quaked, tottered, and trembled violently.*

*A radiant light, surpassing the effulgence of the gods, appeared in the world. Then, the Exalted One said: “Friends, Koṇḍañña has indeed understood. Friends, Koṇḍañña has indeed understood.”*

*Therefore, Venerable Koṇḍañña was named Aññāta Koṇḍañña.*

### Some Reflections on the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta

1. Buddhism is based on personal experience. As such, it is rational and not speculative.
2. The *Buddha* discarded all authority and developed a Golden Mean which was purely His own.
3. Buddhism is a Way or a Path (*magga*).
4. Rational understanding is the keynote of Buddhism.
5. Blind beliefs are rejected.
6. Instead of beliefs and dogmas, the importance of practice is emphasized. Mere beliefs and dogmas cannot liberate a person.

<sup>108</sup> *Dhammacakkhu* signifies any of the three lower Stages of Sainthood: *Sotāpanna* (Stream-Winner); *Sakadāgāmi* (Once-Returner); and *Anāgāmi* (Non-Returner). Upon hearing this discourse, Koṇḍañña attained the first Stage of Sainthood (*Sotāpanna*). The other *Bhikkhus* attained *Sotāpanna* later. Note: *Sotāpanna* refers to “one who has entered the stream,” while *Sotāpatti* means “entry into the stream,” “path and fruition of Stream-Entry.” *Sotāpanna* is the first stage of Sainthood. There are three kinds of *Sotāpanna*: (1) one “with seven rebirths at most”; (2) one “passing from one noble family to another”; and (3) one “germinating only once more.” Cf. Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines* (4th revised edition; Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society [1980]), p. 202.

<sup>109</sup> Celestial beings of the *deva* and *brahmā* planes.

7. Rites and rituals, so greatly emphasized in the *Vedas*, play no part in Buddhism.
8. There are no gods to be propitiated.
9. There is no priestly class to mediate.
10. Morality (*sīla*), Concentration (*samādhi*), and Wisdom (*paññā*) are essential to achieve the goal — *nibbāna*.
11. The foundations of Buddhism are the Four Noble Truths, which can be verified by one's own experience.
12. The Four Noble Truths are associated with one's being — hence, Buddhism is homocentric (anthropocentric) and introverted (introspective).
13. The Four Noble Truths were discovered by the *Buddha*, and He was not indebted to anyone for them. In His own words: "They were not heard of before."
14. Being truths, they cannot change with time.
15. The first Truth, Suffering (*dukkha*), which deals with the constituents of self or so-called "individuality" and the different phases of life, is to be analyzed, scrutinized, and examined. This analysis, scrutiny, and examination leads to a proper understanding of oneself.
16. Rational understanding of the first Truth leads to the eradication of the cause of suffering — the second Truth, which deals with the psychological attitude of the ordinary man (the "worldling" [*puthujjana*]) towards external objects of sense.
17. The second Truth, the Cause of Suffering (*samudaya*), is concerned with a powerful force latent in us all — craving (*taṇhā*), or attachment.
18. It is this powerful, invisible mental force that is the cause of all the ills of life.
19. The second Truth indirectly deals with past, present, and future births.
20. The existence of a series of births is, therefore, acknowledged by the *Buddha*.
21. The doctrine of *kamma*,<sup>110</sup> its corollary, is thereby implied.
22. The third Truth, the Cessation of Suffering (*nirodha*), though dependent upon oneself, is beyond logical reasoning and is supramundane (*lokuttara*), unlike the first two Truths, which are mundane (*lokiya*).
23. The third Truth is purely a self-realization (a *dhamma*<sup>111</sup>), to be comprehended by the mental eye (*sacchikātabba*).
24. This Truth is to be realized by complete renunciation (*nekkhamma*). It is not a case of renouncing external objects but of renouncing internal attachment to the external world.

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<sup>110</sup> Sanskrit *Karma*. *Kamma* denotes wholesome and unwholesome volitional actions and their concomitant mental factors, which cause rebirth and shape one's destiny. These karmic volitions (*kamma-cetanā*) become manifest as wholesome or unwholesome actions by body (*kāya-kamma*), speech (*vacī-kamma*), and mind (*mano-kamma*). Cf. Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines* (4th revised edition; Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society [1980]), pp. 91—94.

<sup>111</sup> Here, *dhamma* means "quality, thing, phenomenon, object of mind."

25. Thus, the third Truth is realized with the complete eradication of attachment to the external world. It should be noted that mere complete destruction of the force is not the third Truth — *nibbāna*. That would be tantamount to annihilation. *Nibbāna* has to be realized by eradicating that which binds one to the mundane.
26. It should also be understood that *nibbāna* is not produced (*uppādetabba*) but is attained (*pattaba*). It can be attained in this life itself. It therefore follows that, though rebirth is one of the chief doctrines of Buddhism, the goal of Buddhism does not depend on a future rebirth.
27. The third Truth has to be realized by developing the fourth Truth.
28. To eradicate one mighty force, eight powerful factors have to be developed — the Noble Eightfold Path.
29. All these eight factors are purely mental.
30. Eight powerful wholesome mental forces are summoned to attack one latent unwholesome mental force.
31. Absolute purity, complete deliverance from all repeated births, a mind released from all defilements,<sup>112</sup> and immortality (*amata*)<sup>113</sup> are the attendant blessings of this great victory. Is this deliverance a perfection or absolute purity? The latter is preferable. In each case, one might ask the questions — What is being perfected? What is being purified? Buddhism does not recognize a being or permanent entity, only a stream of consciousness. It is thus more correct to say that it is this stream of consciousness that is purified by eradicating all defilements.

<sup>112</sup> Defilements (*kilesa*) are mind-defiling, unwholesome qualities. There are ten defilements, namely: (1) greed (*lobha*), or attachment; (2) hatred, or aversion (*dosa*); (3) delusion (*moha*); (4) conceit (*māna*); (5) false views (*micchā-diṭṭhi* or simply *diṭṭhi*); (6) skeptical doubt (*vicikicchā*); (7) lethargy, depression, mental dullness (*thīna*); (8) restlessness (*uddhacca*); (9) moral shamelessness (*ahirika*); and (10) lack of moral dread, or unconscientiousness (*anottappa*). Cf. Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines* (4th revised edition; Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society [1980]), p. 103.

<sup>113</sup> That is, final release from the endless cycle of rebirths (*samsāra*), and, therefore, from ever-repeated deaths.



THE SECOND DISCOURSE OF THE BUDDHA<sup>114</sup>

## Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta

*On one occasion, the Exalted One was dwelling at the Deer Park at Isipatana near Benares. Then, the Exalted One addressed the group of Five Bhikkhus, saying: “O Bhikkhus!”*

*“Lord,” they replied.*

*Thereupon, the Exalted One spoke as follows:*

*“The body,<sup>115</sup> O Bhikkhus, is soulless.<sup>116</sup> If, O Bhikkhus, there were in [this body] a soul,<sup>117</sup> the body would not be subject to suffering. ‘Let this body be thus, let this body not be thus.’ Such possibilities would also exist. But, inasmuch as this body is soulless, it is subject to suffering, and no possibilities exist for [ordering]: ‘Let this body be thus, let this body not be thus.’*

*“In like manner, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness<sup>118</sup> are soulless.<sup>119</sup>*

*“What do you think, O Bhikkhus, is this body permanent or impermanent?”*

*“Impermanent,<sup>120</sup> Lord.”*

*“Is that which is impermanent happy or painful?”*

*“It is painful,<sup>121</sup> Lord.”*

*“Is it justifiable, then, to think of that which is impermanent, painful, and transitory: ‘This is mine; I am this; this is my soul?’”*

*“Certainly not, Lord.”*

<sup>114</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, Khandhavagga, Khandha Saṃyutta.

<sup>115</sup> *Rūpa* “body, corporeality, corporeal group.” The term *rūpa* designates a combination of several physical phenomena constituting a temporary unity. Cf. Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines* (4th revised edition; Kandy, Śrī Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society [1980]), p. 175.

<sup>116</sup> *Anattā* (Sanskrit *anātman*) “non-self, non-ego, egolessness, soullessness.” The doctrine of *anattā* teaches that, neither within the bodily and mental phenomena of existence, nor outside of them, can there be found anything that, in the ultimate sense, can be regarded as a self-existing real ego-entity, soul, or any other abiding substance. Cf. Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines* (4th revised edition; Kandy, Śrī Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society [1980]), pp. 14–16.

<sup>117</sup> A permanent, unchanging entity created by a God or emanating from a *paramātma* (Divine Essence).

<sup>118</sup> The so-called “being” of these five aggregates (cf. footnote 105). Outside of these five aggregates, there is no being. If the aggregates are removed, nothing remains. A soul does not abide in any one group or in any aggregate, nor in all of them, nor outside of them.

<sup>119</sup> The *Buddha* makes the same assertion as above in connection with each of the remaining four parts of the so-called “being.” The *Buddha* raises similar queries with regard to each of the other constituents of being. The translation is abridged here.

<sup>120</sup> *Anicca* “impermanent.”

<sup>121</sup> *Dukkha* “painful, sorrowful, suffering, ill, unsatisfactory.”



*“Similarly, O Bhikkhus, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness are impermanent and painful.*

*“Is it justifiable, then, to think of these which are impermanent, painful, and transitory: ‘These are mine; I am these; these are my soul?’”*

*“Certainly not, Lord.”*

*“Then, O Bhikkhus, the whole body, whether past, present, or future, personal or external, coarse or subtle, low or high, far or near, should be understood by right knowledge in its real nature: ‘This is not mine; I am not this; this is not my soul.’*

*“All feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness, whether past, present, or future, personal or external, coarse or subtle, low or high, far or near, should be understood by right knowledge in their real nature: ‘These are not mine; I am not these; these are not my soul.’*

*“The learned noble disciple who sees thus becomes disgusted with the body, with feelings, with perceptions, with mental formations, and with consciousness; he becomes detached from these abhorrent things and is liberated through detachment. Then, the knowledge dawns on him: ‘Emancipated am I.’ He understands that rebirth is ended, lived is the Holy Life, done what should be done, there is no more of this state again.”*

*This the Exalted One said, and the delighted Bhikkhus applauded the words of the Exalted One.*

*When the Buddha expounded this Teaching, the minds of the group of five Bhikkhus were freed of defilements without any attachments.<sup>122</sup> ■*

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<sup>122</sup> That is, they all attained Arahantship.

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# 7

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## The Teaching of the Dhamma

*“Blessed is the birth of the Buddha, blessed is the teaching of the Dhamma, blessed is the Sangha,<sup>124</sup> where all live in harmony.”<sup>125</sup>*

### The Conversion of Yasa and His Friends

In Benares, there was a millionaire’s son named Yasa, who led a luxurious life. One morning, he arose early and, to his utter disgust, saw his female attendants and musicians asleep in repulsive positions. The whole spectacle was so disgusting that the palace presented the gloomy appearance of a charnel house. Realizing the vanities of the worldly life, he stole away from home, saying: “I am distressed, I am oppressed.” He headed in the direction of Isipatana, where the *Buddha* was temporarily residing after having taught the *Dhamma* to the five *Bhikkhus*.<sup>126</sup>

When Yasa arrived at Isipatana, the *Buddha*, as usual, was pacing back and forth in an open space. Seeing Yasa coming from afar, the *Buddha* stopped his pacing and sat down. Yasa stopped not far from the *Buddha* and cried out: “I am distressed, I am oppressed.”

Thereupon, the *Buddha* replied: “There is no distress here, O Yasa! There is no oppression here, O Yasa! Come here, Yasa. Take a seat. I will expound the *Dhamma* to you.”

The distressed Yasa was pleased to hear the encouraging words of the *Buddha*. Removing his golden sandals, he approached the *Buddha*, respectfully saluted Him, and sat on one side.

The *Buddha* then expounded the doctrine to him, and he attained the first stage of Sainthood (*Sotāpanna*).

At first, the *Buddha* spoke to Yasa about generosity (*dāna*), morality (*sīla*), celestial states (*sagga*), the evils of sensory pleasures (*kāmādīnava*), and the blessings of

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<sup>124</sup> The *Sangha* is the world’s oldest historic celibate Order, founded by the *Buddha* some 2600 years ago. It is “democratic in constitution and communistic in distribution.” Strictly speaking, the *Sangha* refers only to those noble disciples who have realized the Four Paths and Four Fruits. The ordinary *Bhikkhus* and *Bhikkhunis* are merely their representatives. The Pāli word for the larger Buddhist community is *parisā*.

<sup>125</sup> *Dhammapada*, XIV, The *Buddha*, verse 194.

<sup>126</sup> This event took place on the fifth day after the *Buddha* had delivered His first discourse. At that time, all of the five *Bhikkhus* had already attained Arahantship.

renunciation (*nekkhammānisaṃsa*). When the *Buddha* found that Yasa's mind was pliable and was ready to appreciate the deeper teaching, He taught the Four Noble Truths.

Yasa's mother was the first to notice the absence of her son, and she reported the matter to her husband. The millionaire immediately dispatched horsemen in four directions, and he himself went towards Isipatana, following the footprints left by the golden slippers. The *Buddha* saw him coming from afar and, by means of His psychic powers, willed that the millionaire should not be able to see his son.

The millionaire approached the *Buddha* and respectfully inquired whether He had seen his son Yasa. The *Buddha* invited him to sit down and assured him that he would be able to see his son. Pleased with the happy news, the millionaire sat down. Thereupon, the *Buddha* delivered a discourse to him, and he was so delighted he exclaimed:

*"Excellent, O Lord, excellent! It is as if, Lord, a man were to set upright that which was overturned, or were to reveal that which was hidden, or were to point out the way to one who had gone astray, or were to hold a lamp amidst the darkness so that those who have eyes might see! Even so has the Exalted One expounded the doctrine in various ways.*

*"I, Lord, take refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. May the Lord receive me as a follower who has taken refuge from this day to the end of my life!"*

The millionaire was thus the first lay follower to seek refuge using the threefold formula.

On hearing the discourse delivered to his father, Yasa attained Arahantship. Thereupon, the *Buddha* withdrew his psychic powers so that Yasa's father could see his son. The joyous millionaire beheld his son and invited the *Buddha* and His disciples for alms on the following day. The *Buddha* expressed His acceptance of the invitation by His silence.

After the departure of the millionaire, Yasa begged the *Buddha* to grant him the Lesser<sup>127</sup> and the Higher Ordination.

*"Come, O Bhikkhu! Well taught is the Doctrine. Lead the Holy Life to make a complete end of suffering."*

With these words, the *Buddha* conferred on him the Higher Ordination.<sup>128</sup>

With the Venerable Yasa, the number of *Arahants* increased to six.

As invited, the *Buddha* visited the millionaire's house the following day with His six disciples.

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<sup>127</sup> By *pabbajjā*, literally, "going forth" or "renunciation," which is the mere admission into the Holy Order by seeking refuge in the *Buddha*, the *Dhamma*, and the *Sangha*.

<sup>128</sup> In the early days of the Order, the Higher Ordination, *Upasampadā*, literally, "replete with a higher morality," was granted with these words.

Venerable Yasa's mother and former wife heard the doctrine expounded by the *Buddha* and, having attained the first stage of Sainthood, became His first two lay female disciples.<sup>129</sup>

Venerable Yasa had four distinguished friends, named Vimala, Subāhu, Punnañji, and Gavampati. When they heard that their noble friend had shaved his head and beard and, donning the saffron-colored robe, had entered the homeless life, they approached Venerable Yasa and expressed their desire to follow his example. At that, Venerable Yasa introduced them to the *Buddha*, and, on hearing the *Dhamma*, they also attained Arahantship.

Fifty more worthy friends of Venerable Yasa, who belonged to leading families of various districts, after receiving instructions from the *Buddha*, attained Arahantship and entered the Holy Order.

Hardly two months had elapsed since His Enlightenment, and the number of *Arahants* had risen to sixty. All of them came from distinguished families and were worthy sons of worthy fathers.

### The First Messengers of Truth

The *Buddha*, who had succeeded in enlightening sixty disciples, decided to send them forth as messengers of Truth to teach His new *Dhamma* to all, without distinction. Before dispatching them in various directions, He exhorted them as follows:

*"Freed am I, O Bhikkhus, from all bonds, whether divine or human. You, too, O Bhikkhus, are freed from all bonds, whether divine or human.*

*"Go forth, O Bhikkhus, for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, benefit, and happiness of gods and men. Let not two of you go the same way: Teach, O Bhikkhus, the Dhamma, excellent in the beginning, excellent in the middle, excellent in the end, both in the spirit and in the letter. Proclaim the Holy Life,<sup>130</sup> altogether perfect and pure.*

*"There are beings with little dust in their eyes, who, not hearing the Dhamma, will perish. There will be those who will understand the Dhamma.*

*"I, too, O Bhikkhus, will go to Uruvelā in Senānigāma in order to teach the Dhamma.*

<sup>129</sup> *Upāsaka* (m.) and *Upāsikā* (f.), literally, "one who closely associates with the Triple Gem." These two terms are applied to male and female lay followers of the *Buddha* respectively. One becomes an *Upāsaka* or *Upāsikā* immediately after taking the three Refuges, namely: *Buddhaṃ saranāṃ gacchāmi* "I go to the *Buddha* for Refuge," *Dhammaṃ saranāṃ gacchāmi* "I go to the *Dhamma* for Refuge," *Sanghaṃ saranāṃ gacchāmi* "I go to the *Sangha* for Refuge." This is the threefold formula (*tevācika*).

<sup>130</sup> The Pāli term *brahmacariya* "Holy Life," has no connection whatsoever with a God or *Brahmā*. It is used in the sense of "noble," "pure," or "holy." *Brahmacariya* refers to the life of a *Bhikkhu*. It also refers to a lay disciple who observes the eight precepts, especially the third precept, which requires complete chastity, that is, total abstinence from sexual activity of any kind.

*“Hoist the Flag of the Sage. Teach the Sublime Dhamma. Work for the good of others, you who have done your duty.”*

The *Buddha* was thus the first religious teacher to send His enlightened ordained disciples to propagate the doctrine out of compassion for others. With no permanent abode, alone and penniless, these first missionaries were expected to wander from place to place to teach the sublime *Dhamma*. They had no material possessions other than their robes to cover themselves and an alms-bowl to collect food. Inasmuch as the field was extensive and the workers were comparatively few, they were advised to undertake their missionary journeys alone. Since they were *Arahants*, who were freed from all sensory bonds, their chief and only objective was to teach the *Dhamma* and to proclaim the Holy Life (*brahmacariya*). The original role of *Arahants*, who had achieved their life’s goal, was to work for the moral betterment of others, both by example and precept. Material development, though essential for the overall welfare of mankind, was not their concern.

### **Founding of the Order of the Sangha**

At that time, there were sixty *Arahant* disciples in the world. With these Pure Ones as the nucleus, the *Buddha* founded a celibate Order, which “was democratic in constitution and communistic in distribution.” Though the original members were drawn from the highest strata of society and were all educated and rich men, the Order was open to all worthy ones, regardless of caste, class, or rank. Both young and old, belonging to all the castes, were freely admitted to the Order and lived like brothers of the same family, without any distinction. This Noble Order of *Bhikkhus*,<sup>131</sup> which stands to this day, is the oldest continuous body of celibates in the world.

Not everyone was expected to leave the household life and take up the life of a homeless mendicant. Lay followers, too, were able to lead a good life in accordance with the *Dhamma* and attain Sainthood. Venerable Yasa’s parents and his former wife, for instance, were the foremost lay followers of the *Buddha*. All three were sufficiently spiritually advanced to attain the first stage of Sainthood (*Sotāpanna*).

With the sixty *Arahants* as ideal messengers of the Truth, the *Buddha* decided to propagate His sublime *Dhamma*, purely by expounding the doctrine to those who wished to listen.

### **Conversion of Thirty Young Men**

The *Buddha* resided at Isipatana near Benares for as long as He liked and then set out for Uruvelā. On the way, He rested at the foot of a tree in a grove.

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<sup>131</sup> Sanskrit *Bhikṣu*. Though commonly translated as “monk,” the original meaning of the Pāli term *Bhikkhu* was “wandering ascetic, mendicant, one who seeks alms.”

At that time, thirty happy young men went with their wives to that particular grove to amuse themselves. Since one of them had no wife, he took a courtesan with him. While they were enjoying themselves, this woman absconded with their valuables. The young men searched for her in the forest and, seeing the *Buddha*, inquired of Him whether He had seen a woman passing that way. “Which do you think, young men, is more important: seeking a woman, or seeking oneself?”<sup>132</sup> questioned the *Buddha*. “Seeking oneself is more important, O Lord!” replied the young men. “Well then, sit down. I shall teach the doctrine to you,” said the *Buddha*. “Very well, Lord,” they replied, and, respectfully saluting the Exalted One, sat down expectantly. They attentively listened to Him and obtained “The Eye of Truth.”<sup>133</sup> After this, they entered the Order and received the Higher Ordination.

### Conversion of the Three Kassapa Brothers

Wandering from place to place, in due course, the *Buddha* arrived at Uruvelā. Here, there lived three ascetics with matted hair known as Uruvelā Kassapa, Nadi Kassapa, and Gayā Kassapa.<sup>134</sup> They were brothers living separately, with 500, 300, and 200 followers, respectively. The oldest brother was infatuated with his own spiritual attainments and was laboring under the misconception that he was an *Arahant*. The *Buddha* approached him first and sought his permission to spend the night in his fire-chamber, where a fierce serpent-king dwelt. By means of His psychic powers, the *Buddha* subdued the serpent. This pleased Uruvelā Kassapa, and he invited the *Buddha* to stay there as his guest. The *Buddha* was compelled to exhibit His psychic powers on several occasions to impress the ascetic, but, still, Uruvelā Kassapa adhered to the belief that the *Buddha* was not an *Arahant* and that he was. Finally, the *Buddha* was able to prove that He was indeed an *Arahant*. Thereupon, Uruvelā Kassapa and his followers entered the Order and obtained the Higher Ordination.

Uruvelā Kassapa’s brothers and their followers also followed his example. Accompanied by the three Kassapa brothers and their thousand followers, the *Buddha* went to Gayā Sīsa, not far from Uruvelā. Here, He expounded the *Ādittapariyāya Sutta*<sup>135</sup> (the discourse on “all is in flames,” also known as the “Fire Discourse” or the “Fire Sermon”), hearing which all attained Arahantship.

<sup>132</sup> “Seeking oneself”: This phrase is very significant. *Attānam* is the accusative of *attā*, which means “self.” Here, the *Buddha* is not referring to any soul or spirit latent in man as some scholars have attempted to show. How could the *Buddha* affirm the existence of a soul when He clearly denied its existence in His second discourse? The *Buddha* is using this phrase exactly in the sense of “seek yourself” or “look within.”

<sup>133</sup> *Dhammacakkhu* — This refers to any of the three lower Stages of Sainthood: *Sotāpanna* (Stream-Winner), *Sakadāgāmi* (Once-Returner), and *Anāgāmi* (Non-Returner).

<sup>134</sup> The three brothers were named after where they dwelt: Uruvelā Kassapa = “Kassapa of Uruvelā,” Nadi Kassapa = “Kassapa of the River,” Gayā Kassapa = “Kassapa of Gayā.”

<sup>135</sup> *Vinaya Piṭaka*, Khandhaka, Mahāvagga, 1:21; *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, 35. Connected Discourses on the Six Sense Bases (*Salāyatanasaṃyutta*), Division I. The Root Fifty, III. The All, Burning, no. 35:28.



**Ādittapariyāya Sutta — Discourse on “All Is in Flames”**

*“All is in flames, O Bhikkhus! What, O Bhikkhus, is all in flames? Eye is in flames. Forms are in flames. Eye-contact is in flames. Feeling which is pleasurable or painful, or neither pleasurable nor painful, arising from eye-contact is in flames. By what is it kindled? By the flames of lust, hatred, ignorance, birth, decay, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair is it kindled, I declare.*

*“Ear is in flames. Sounds are in flames. Ear-contact is in flames. Feeling which is pleasurable or painful, or neither pleasurable nor painful, arising from ear-contact is in flames. By what is it kindled? By the flames of lust, hatred, ignorance, birth, decay, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair is it kindled, I declare.*

*“Nose is in flames. Smells are in flames. Nose-contact is in flames. Feeling which is pleasurable or painful, or neither pleasurable nor painful, arising from nose-contact is in flames. By what is it kindled? By the flames of lust, hatred, ignorance, birth, decay, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair is it kindled, I declare.*

*“Tongue is in flames. Taste is in flames. Tongue-contact is in flames. Feeling which is pleasurable or painful, or neither pleasurable nor painful, arising from tongue-contact is in flames. By what is it kindled? By the flames of lust, hatred, ignorance, birth, decay, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair is it kindled, I declare.*

*“Body is in flames. Touch is in flames. Body-contact is in flames. Feeling which is pleasurable or painful, or neither pleasurable nor painful, arising from body-contact is in flames. By what is it kindled? By the flames of lust, hatred, ignorance, birth, decay, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair is it kindled, I declare.*

*“Mind is in flames. Mental objects are in flames. Mental-contact is in flames. Feeling which is pleasurable or painful, or neither pleasurable nor painful, arising from mental-contact is in flames. By what is it kindled? By the flames of lust, hatred, ignorance, birth, decay, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair is it kindled, I declare.*

*“Reflecting thus, O Bhikkhus, the learned Noble Disciple becomes disgusted with the eye, with forms, with eye-consciousness, with eye-contact, whatever feeling — pleasurable, painful, or neither pleasurable nor painful — that arises from contact with the eye.*

*“Reflecting thus, O Bhikkhus, the learned Noble Disciple becomes disgusted with the ear, with sounds, with ear-consciousness, with ear-contact, whatever feeling — pleasurable, painful, or neither pleasurable nor painful — that arises from contact with the ear.*

*“Reflecting thus, O Bhikkhus, the learned Noble Disciple becomes disgusted with the nose, with smells, with nose-consciousness, with nose-contact,*

*whatever feeling — pleasurable, painful, or neither pleasurable nor painful — that arises from contact with the nose.*

*“Reflecting thus, O Bhikkhus, the learned Noble Disciple becomes disgusted with the tongue, with taste, with tongue-consciousness, with tongue-contact, whatever feeling — pleasurable, painful, or neither pleasurable nor painful — that arises from contact with the tongue.*

*“Reflecting thus, O Bhikkhus, the learned Noble Disciple becomes disgusted with the body, with touch, with body-consciousness, with body-contact, whatever feeling — pleasurable, painful, or neither pleasurable nor painful — that arises from contact with the body.*

*“Reflecting thus, O Bhikkhus, the learned Noble Disciple becomes disgusted with the mind, with mental objects, with mental-consciousness, with mental-contact, whatever feeling — pleasurable, painful, or neither pleasurable nor painful — that arises from contact with the mind.*

*“With disgust, he becomes detached; with detachment, he is delivered. He understands that birth is ended, lived is the Holy Life, done what should be done, and that there is no more of this state again.”*

When the *Buddha* concluded this discourse, all of the thousand followers of the three Kassapa brothers attained Arahantship, thereby eradicating all Defilements.

### **Conversion of Sāriputta and Moggallāna, the two Chief Disciples**

Not far from Rājagaha, in the village of Upatissa, also known as Nālaka, there lived a very intelligent youth named Sāriputta.<sup>136</sup> Since he belonged to the leading family of the village, he was also known as Upatissa. Though nurtured in Brahmanism, his broad outlook on life and mature wisdom compelled him to renounce his ancestral religion for the more tolerant and scientific Teachings of the *Buddha*. His brothers and sisters followed his noble example. His father, Vanganta, apparently remained an adherent of Brahmanism. His mother, who was displeased with her son for having become a disciple of the *Buddha*, was herself converted to Buddhism by Sāriputta at the moment of his death.

Sāriputta was brought up in the lap of luxury. He found a very intimate friend in Moggallāna, also known as Kolita, with whom he had been closely associated in a past life. One day, as both of them were enjoying a hilltop festival, they realized how vain, how transient, were all sensory pleasures. Instantly, they decided to renounce the world and seek the Path of Release. From that moment on, they wandered from place to place in search of Peace.

The two young seekers went first to Sañjaya, who had a large following, and sought ordination under him. Before long, they acquired the meager knowledge which

<sup>136</sup> Literally, “son of Sāri.”

their master was able to impart to them, but, dissatisfied with his teaching, inasmuch as they could not find a remedy for that universal ailment with which humanity is assailed, they left him and continued wandering in search of Peace. In the course of their wanderings, they approached many famous Brahmins and ascetics, but disappointment met them everywhere. Ultimately, they returned to their own village and agreed between themselves that whoever would first discover the Path should inform the other.

It was at that time that the *Buddha* dispatched His sixty disciples to proclaim the *Dhamma* to the world. The *Buddha* Himself proceeded towards Uruvelā, while the Venerable Assaji, one of the first five disciples, headed in the direction of Rājagaha.

The good *kamma*<sup>137</sup> of Sāriputta and Moggallāna now intervened, as if it had been watching their spiritual progress with sympathetic eyes; for Sāriputta, while wandering about the city of Rājagaha, casually met an ascetic whose noble appearance and saintly deportment at once attracted his attention. The ascetic's eyes were fixed lowly at a yoke's distance from him, and his calm face betokened deep peace within. With body well composed and robes neatly arranged, this venerable figure passed with measured steps from door to door, accepting the morsels of food which the charitable placed in his bowl. "Never before have I seen," he thought to himself, "an ascetic like this. Surely he must be one of those who have attained Arahantship or one who is practicing the path leading to Arahantship. What if I were to approach him and ask, 'For whose sake, Sir, have you renounced the world? Who is your teacher? Whose doctrine do you profess?'"

However, Sāriputta refrained from questioning him, since he thought that he would interfere with the ascetic's silent begging rounds by so doing.

The *Arahant* Assaji, having obtained what little he needed, then sought a suitable place to eat his meal. Seeing this, Sāriputta gladly availed himself of the opportunity to offer him his own stool and water from his pot. Fulfilling, thus, the preliminary duties of a pupil, he exchanged pleasant greetings with Venerable Assaji and reverently inquired: "Venerable Sir, your demeanor is calm and serene, the hue of your skin is clean and clear. For whose sake have you renounced the world? Who is your teacher? Whose doctrine do you profess?"

The unassuming *Arahant* Assaji modestly replied, as is the characteristic of all noble men: "I am still young in the Order, brother, and I am not able to expound the *Dhamma* to you at length."

"I am called Upatissa, Venerable Sir. Say much or little according to your ability, and leave it to me to understand in a hundred or a thousand ways. Tell me just the substance. That is all I require. A long, drawn-out explanation is not necessary."

Thereupon, Venerable Assaji uttered a four-line stanza, thus skillfully summing up the profound philosophy of the Master on the truth of the law of cause and effect:

<sup>137</sup> Sanskrit *karma*. *Kamma* means "volitional action," specifically, the wholesome (*kusala*) and unwholesome (*akusala*) volitions (*cetanā*) and their concomitant mental factors (*cetasika*), causing rebirth (*jāti*, *paṭisandhi*) and shaping the destiny of beings. These karmical volitions (*kamma-cetanā*) become manifest as wholesome or unwholesome actions by body (*kāya-kamma*), speech (*vacī-kamma*), or mind (*mano-kamma*). The term "*kamma*" does not apply to the consequence or result of mental or physical action — that is known as *vipāka*. Thus, *kamma* is the deed; *vipāka* is the result.

*Ye dhammā hetuppabhavā,  
Tesaṃ hetuṃ tathāgato,  
Āha tesaṃ ca yo nirodho:  
Evaṃ vādī mahā samano.*

*“Of things that proceed from a cause,  
Their cause the Tathāgata has explained,  
And also their cessation:  
Thus teaches the Great Ascetic.”*

Sāriputta was sufficiently spiritually advanced to comprehend such a lofty teaching even though it was succinctly expressed. He was only in need of a slight indication to discover the truth. So well did the Venerable Assaji guide him on his upward path that, immediately upon hearing the first two lines, Sāriputta attained the first stage of Sainthood, *Sotāpanna*.

The new convert Sāriputta must have been, no doubt, unable to find the words to thank his venerable teacher for introducing him to the sublime Teachings of the *Buddha*. He expressed his deep indebtedness for the brilliant exposition of the truth given by Venerable Assaji and, obtaining from him the particulars with regard to the Master, took his leave.

Later, the devotion he showed towards his teacher was such that, inasmuch as he had first heard the *Dhamma* from Venerable Assaji, he would extend his clasped hands in an attitude of reverent obeisance in whatever direction he heard that the Venerable Assaji was residing, and he would also turn his head in that direction whenever he lay down to sleep.

Now, in accordance with the agreement they had made, Sāriputta returned to his friend Moggallāna to convey the joyful news. Moggallāna, who was as spiritually advanced as his friend, also attained the first stage of Sainthood on hearing the stanza. Overwhelmed with joy, as in duty bound, they went to meet their teacher Saṅjaya with the objective of converting him to the new doctrine. Frustrated in their attempt, Sāriputta and Moggallāna, accompanied by many of Saṅjaya's followers, who readily joined them, set out for the Veḷuvana monastery to visit their illustrious Teacher, the *Buddha*.

In compliance with their request, the *Buddha* admitted both of them into the Order by uttering the words: *Etha Bhikkhave!* “Come, O *Bhikkhus!*”

Two weeks later, Venerable Sāriputta attained Arahantship on hearing the *Buddha* expound the Vedanā Pariggaha Sutta (*Majjhima Nikāya*, no. 74) to the wandering ascetic Dīghanakha. On the very same day, in the evening, the *Buddha* gathered round Him His disciples and the exalted positions of the first and second disciples in the *Sangha* were conferred, respectively, on the Theras Sāriputta and Moggallāna, who had also attained Arahantship a week earlier. ■



# 8

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## The Buddha and His Relatives

*“Service to relatives is a blessing.”*<sup>138</sup>

### King Suddhodana Desires to See the Buddha

News reached the ears of the aged King Suddhodana that the *Buddha* was residing at Rājagaha and that He was teaching the *Dhamma* there. On hearing this news, King Suddhodana’s desire to see his enlightened son grew stronger and stronger. On nine successive occasions, the King sent emissaries, each with a large retinue, to invite the *Buddha* to visit Kapilavatthu. Contrary to the King’s expectations, they all heard the *Dhamma* and, attaining Arahantship, entered the Order. Since *Arahants* are indifferent to worldly concerns, they did not convey the King’s message to the *Buddha*.

The disappointed King finally dispatched another faithful emissary, Kāludāyī, who had been a boyhood playmate of the *Buddha*. He agreed to go inasmuch as he was granted permission by the King to enter the Order. Like the other emissaries before him, he had the good fortune to attain Arahantship and joined the Order. But, unlike the others, he conveyed the King’s message to the *Buddha* and persuaded Him to visit His aged royal father. Since the season was most suitable for traveling, the *Buddha*, attended by a large retinue of His disciples, journeyed the whole distance in slow steps, proclaiming the *Dhamma* on the way, and, in due course, arrived at Kapilavatthu after two months.

Arrangements were made for the *Buddha* to reside at a park owned by Nigrodha, a Sākyan. The conceited elderly Sākyans, thinking to themselves: “He is our younger brother, our nephew, our grandson,” said to the young Sākyan princes: “You can pay Him obeisance if you like; we will sit behind you.” As they sat without paying Him due reverence, the *Buddha* subdued their pride by rising into the air and exhibiting the “Twin Wonder.”<sup>139</sup> The King, seeing this wonderful display, saluted Him immediately, saying

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<sup>138</sup> *Khuddaka Nikāya, Sutta Nipāta, Mangala Sutta.*

<sup>139</sup> *Yamaka Pāṭihāriya*, often translated as “The Twin Miracle,” is a psychic phenomenon that only a *Buddha* can perform. By His psychic powers, He makes it appear as though fire and water are issuing from the pores of His body simultaneously. The *Paṭisambhidāmagga* Commentary states that by fire and water are meant red and blue rays.

that this was his third salutation.<sup>140</sup> All Sākyans were then compelled to pay Him due reverence. Thereupon, the *Buddha* came down from the sky and sat on the seat prepared for Him. The humbled Sākyans took their seats, eager to listen to His Teaching.

At this moment, an unprecedented shower of rain began to fall on the Sākyan kinsfolk. The occurrence of this strange happening resulted in a discussion among themselves. Thereupon, the *Buddha* expounded the *Vessantara Jātaka*<sup>141</sup> to show that a similar incident took place in the presence of His relatives in a previous birth.

The Sākyans were delighted with the discourse, and they departed, not knowing that it was their duty to invite the *Buddha* and His disciples for the noon meal on the following day. It did not occur to the King either to invite the *Buddha*, although he thought to himself: “If my son does not come to the palace, where will He go?” Returning home, the King ordered several kinds of food to be made ready, expecting their arrival at the palace.

### **The Buddha Goes Round for Alms; The Conversion of King Suddhodana**

Inasmuch as there had been no special invitation for the noon meal, the *Buddha* and His disciples got ready, on the following day, to seek alms from the houses of the citizens of Kapilavatthu. Before proceeding, He considered to Himself: “Did the *Buddhas* of the past, upon entering the city of their kinsfolk, immediately enter the houses of their relatives, or did they go from house to house in regular order receiving alms?” Perceiving that they went from house to house, the *Buddha* went into the streets of Kapilavatthu seeking alms.

On hearing of this seemingly unbefitting conduct of the *Buddha* from his daughter-in-law, Yasodharā, the King, greatly perturbed in mind, hurried to the scene and, saluting the *Buddha*, said: “Son, why do you embarrass me? I am overwhelmed with shame to see you begging alms. Is it proper for you, who used to travel in a golden palanquin, to seek alms in this very city? Why do you put me to shame?”

“I am not putting you to shame, O great King! I am following the custom of my lineage,” replied the *Buddha*, to the King’s astonishment.

“But, dear son, is it the custom of my lineage to gain a livelihood by seeking alms? Surely, Lord, ours is the warrior lineage of Mahāsammata, and not a single warrior has gone seeking alms.”

“O great King, this is not the custom of your royal lineage, but it is the custom of my *Buddha* lineage. *Buddhas* live by seeking alms.”

Standing on the street, the *Buddha* then advised the King thus:

<sup>140</sup> He saluted Him the first time when he saw the infant prince’s feet rest on the head of the ascetic Asita whom he wanted the child to revere. His second salutation took place at the Plowing Festival, when he saw the young prince seated cross-legged on the couch, absorbed in meditation.

<sup>141</sup> This interesting story, which is the longest in the *Jātaka* Commentary, illustrates His unrivaled generosity.



*“Do not be heedless in standing [at the door for alms]; scrupulously observe this practice. One who observes proper practice<sup>142</sup> lives happily both in this world and the next.”<sup>143</sup>*

Upon hearing this, the King realized the Truth and attained the first stage of Sainthood (*Sotāpanna*). Immediately after, he took the *Buddha*’s bowl and, leading the *Buddha* and His disciples to the palace, served them with choice food. At the close of the meal, the *Buddha* again exhorted the King as follows:

*“Observe proper practice; do not observe improper practice.<sup>144</sup> One who observes proper practice lives happily both in this world and the next.”<sup>145</sup>*

Thereupon, the King attained the second stage of Sainthood (*Sakadāgāmī*), and Pajāpatī Gotamī attained the first stage of Sainthood (*Sotāpanna*).

On a later occasion, when it was related to the *Buddha* that the King refused to believe that his son had died owing to His severe austerities without achieving His goal, the *Buddha* expounded the *Dhammapāla Jātaka* to show that, in a previous birth too, he refused to believe that his son had died, even though he was shown a pile of bones. This time, King Suddhodana attained the third state of Sainthood (*Anāgāmī*).

On his deathbed, the King listened to the *Dhamma* from the *Buddha* for the last time and attained Arahantship. After experiencing the bliss of Emancipation, he passed away as a lay *Arahant* when the *Buddha* was about forty years old.

### The Buddha and Yasodharā

Princess Yasodharā, also known as Rāhulamātā, Bimbā, and Bhaddakaccānā, was the daughter of King Suppabuddha, who ruled Koliya, and Pamitā, sister of King Suddhodana. She was the same age as Prince Siddhattha, whom she married at the age of sixteen. It was by exhibiting His military prowess in an archery contest that Prince Siddhattha won her hand. She led an extremely happy and luxurious life. In her 29th year, on the very day that she gave birth to her only son, Rāhula, her wise and contemplative husband, whom she loved with all her heart, resolved to renounce the world to seek deliverance from the ills of life. Without bidding farewell to His faithful and charming wife, He left the palace at night, leaving young Yasodharā to look after the child by herself. She awoke as usual the following morning, but, to her surprise, when she went to greet her beloved husband, she found Him missing. When she realized that

<sup>142</sup> The Commentary states that proper practice (*dhammam sucaritaṃ*) means stopping for alms at one house after another in the course of the alms-round except where it is not proper to go (such as the house of a prostitute).

<sup>143</sup> *Dhammapada*, XIII, The World, verse 168.

<sup>144</sup> Improper practice (*na naṃ ducaritaṃ*) means not observing the rules listed in footnote 142 above.

<sup>145</sup> *Dhammapada*, XIII, The World, verse 169.

her husband had left the palace, she was overcome with indescribable grief. Her most cherished possession was lost forever. The palace, with all its allurements, was now a dungeon to her. The whole world appeared blank. Her only consolation was her infant son.

Though several *Khattiya*<sup>146</sup> princes sought her hand, she rejected all of their proposals and lived ever faithful to her beloved husband. Hearing that her husband was living a hermit's life, she removed all her jewelry and wore a plain saffron-colored robe. Throughout the six years during which the Ascetic Gotama struggled for Enlightenment, Princess Yasodharā watched His actions from afar and did likewise.

When the *Buddha* visited Kapilavatthu after His Enlightenment and was being hosted by the King in the palace on the day following His arrival, all but the Princess Yasodharā came to pay reverence to Him. She thought: "Certainly, if there is any virtue in me, the noble Lord Himself will come to my presence. Then will I pay Him reverence."

After the meal was over, the *Buddha* handed over His bowl to the King and, accompanied by His two chief disciples, entered the chamber of Yasodharā and sat on a seat prepared for him, saying: "Let the King's daughter pay me reverence as she likes. Say nothing."

Hearing of the *Buddha*'s visit, Yasodharā had directed the ladies in the court to wear saffron-colored garments. When the *Buddha* took His seat, Yasodharā came swiftly to Him and, gently clasping His ankles, placed her head at His feet and paid reverence to Him as she liked. After demonstrating her devotion and respect thus, she sat down with due reverence. Thereupon, the King praised her virtues and, commenting on her love and loyalty, said: "Lord, when my daughter-in-law heard that you were wearing saffron-colored robes, she also robed herself in saffron-colored robes; when she heard that you were taking one meal a day, she also did the same; when she heard that you had given up lofty couches, she lay on a low couch; when she heard that you had given up garlands and scents, she also gave them up; when her relatives sent messages to say that they would maintain her, she did not even look at one single one. Such is the virtue of my daughter-in-law."

Thereupon, the *Buddha* remarked, citing the *Candakinnara Jātaka*: "Not only in this present birth, O King, but in a previous birth too, she protected me and was devoted and faithful to me."

Recalling this past association with her, the *Buddha* comforted Yasodharā and then left the palace.

After the death of King Suddhodana, when Pajāpatī Gotamī became a nun (*Bhikkhuni*<sup>147</sup>), Yasodharā also entered the Order and attained Arahantship. Among

<sup>146</sup> At the time of the *Buddha*, there were four main castes in India: (1) *Khattiya* (Sanskrit *Kṣatriya*), "Warrior Caste"; (2) *Brāhmaṇa* (in this book, the term "Brahmin" is used to denote a person of this caste, while the term *brāhmaṇa* is used to denote a "Saint"), "Priestly Caste"; (3) *Vessa* (Sanskrit *Vaiśya*), "Trading and Agricultural Caste"; and (4) *Sudda* (Sanskrit *Śūdra*), "Low Caste."

<sup>147</sup> Sanskrit *Bhikṣuṇī* (f.) "one who seeks alms, a mendicant, a Buddhist nun."

female disciples, she was the chief of those who attained great supernormal powers<sup>148</sup> (*abhiññā*). She passed away at the age of 78. Her name does not appear in the *Therīgāthā*, but her interesting verses are found in the *Apadāna*.<sup>149</sup>

### The Buddha and Rāhula

Rāhula was the only son of Prince Siddhattha and Princess Yasodharā. He was born on the day when Prince Siddhattha decided to renounce the world. The happy news of the birth of His infant son was conveyed to Prince Siddhattha when He was in the park in a contemplative mood. Contrary to expectations, instead of rejoicing over the news, He exclaimed: *Rāhu jāto, bandhanam jātam*, “A ‘Rāhu’ is born, a fetter has arisen!” Accordingly, the child was named Rāhula<sup>150</sup> by King Suddhodana, his grandfather.

Rāhula was brought up as a fatherless child by his mother and grandfather. When he was seven years old, the *Buddha* visited Kapilavatthu for the first time after His Enlightenment. On the seventh day after His arrival, Princess Yasodharā dressed young Rāhula in fine clothes and, pointing to the *Buddha*, said: “Behold, son, that golden-colored ascetic, looking like Brahmā, surrounded by twenty thousand ascetics! He is your father, and He had great treasures. Since His renunciation, we do not see Him. Go up to Him and ask for your inheritance, saying: ‘Father, I am the prince. After my consecration, I will be a universal monarch. Please give me my wealth, for the son is the owner of what belongs to the father.’”

Innocent Rāhula came to the *Buddha*’s presence and, asking for his inheritance, as advised by his mother, very affectionately added: “O ascetic, even your shadow is pleasing to me.”

After the meal, the *Buddha* left the palace, and Rāhula followed Him, saying: “Give me my inheritance” and uttering much else that was becoming. Nobody attempted to stop him, nor did the *Buddha* prevent Rāhula from following Him. Reaching the park, the *Buddha* thought: “He desires his father’s wealth, but it goes with the world and is full of trouble. I shall give him the sevenfold noble wealth which I received at the foot of the *bodhi*-tree and make him the owner of a transcendental inheritance.” The *Buddha* called upon Venerable Sāriputta to ordain little Rāhula. Thereupon, Rāhula, who was then only seven years old, was admitted into the Noble Order.

King Suddhodana was deeply grieved to hear of the unexpected ordination of his beloved grandson. He approached the *Buddha* and, in humbly requesting Him not to ordain anyone without the prior consent of his parents, said: “When the Lord renounced

<sup>148</sup> The *Anguttara Nikāya* Commentary states: “Of one *Buddha*, four disciples only have great supernormal power. The rest can recall 100,000 *Kalpas*, but not beyond that; but those [four] recall incalculable eras. Under our Teacher’s Order, the two Great Disciples [Sāriputta and Moggallāna] and the Elders Bakkula and Bhaddakkaccānā [Yasodharā], just these four, had this power.”

<sup>149</sup> *Khuddaka Nikāya*. Here, she relates her association with the *Bodhisatta* when He met the *Buddha* Dīpankara and resolved to become a *Buddha* Himself.

<sup>150</sup> Literally, “bound or seized (*la*) by a fetter (*rāhu*).”

the world, it was a cause of great pain to me. It was the same when Nanda renounced and especially so in the case of Rāhula. The love of a father towards a son cuts through the skin, the flesh, the sinew, the bone, and the marrow. Grant, Lord, the request that the Noble Ones may not confer ordination on a son without the permission of his parents.” The *Buddha* readily granted his request and made it a *Vinaya* rule.

It is almost inconceivable how a boy of seven years could lead the Holy Life. But *Sāmaṇera*<sup>151</sup> Rāhula, cultured, exceptionally obedient, and well-disciplined as he was, was very eager to accept instruction from his superiors. It is stated that he would rise early in the morning and, taking a handful of sand, throw it into the air, saying: “Today may I receive from my instructors as much counsel as these grains of sand.”

One of the earliest discourses preached to Rāhula, immediately after his ordination, was the Ambalaṭṭhikā-Rāhulovāda Sutta,<sup>152</sup> in which the *Buddha* emphasized the importance of truthfulness.

One day, the *Buddha* visited the Venerable Rāhula, who, seeing Him coming from afar, arranged a seat and supplied water for washing the feet. The *Buddha* washed His feet and, leaving a small quantity of water in the vessel, said:

*“Do you see, Rāhula, this small quantity of water left in this vessel?”*

*“Yes, Lord.”*

*“Similar, Rāhula, is the monkhood of those who are not ashamed of uttering deliberate lies.”*

The *Buddha* then threw away the small quantity of water and said:

*“Discarded, indeed, is the monkhood of those who are not ashamed of uttering deliberate lies.”*

Next, the *Buddha* turned the vessel upside down and said:

*“Overtaken, indeed, is the monkhood of those who are not ashamed of uttering deliberate lies.”*

Finally, the *Buddha* set the vessel upright and said:

*“Empty and void, indeed, is the monkhood of those who are not ashamed of uttering deliberate lies.”*

*“I say of anyone who is not ashamed of uttering deliberate lies that there is no evil that could not be done by him. Accordingly, Rāhula, thus should you train yourself: ‘Not even in play will I tell a lie’.”*

<sup>151</sup> Buddhist Sanskrit *Śrāmaṇeraka* “novice.”

<sup>152</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, Bhikkhuvagga, Ambalaṭṭhikā-Rāhulovāda Sutta, no. 61.

Emphasizing the importance of truthfulness with such homely illustrations, the *Buddha* explained to Rāhula the value of reflection and its criterion of morality in a way that a child could understand.

The *Buddha* then questioned Rāhula:

*“Rāhula, for what purpose is a mirror?”*

*“For the purpose of reflecting, Lord.”*

*“In like manner, Rāhula, only after reflecting should bodily action be done; only after reflecting should verbal action be done; only after reflecting should mental action be done.*

*“Whatever action you desire to do with the body, of that particular bodily action, you should reflect: ‘Now, this action that I desire to perform with the body, would this, my bodily action, be conducive to my own harm, or to the harm of others, or to that of both myself and others?’ Then, unskillful is this bodily action, entailing suffering and producing pain.*

*“If, when reflecting, you should realize: ‘Now, this bodily action of mine that I desire to perform would be conducive to my own harm, or to the harm of others, or to that of both myself and others.’ Then, unskillful is this bodily action, entailing suffering and producing pain. Such a bodily action you must on no account perform.*

*“If, on the other hand, when reflecting you realize: ‘Now, this bodily action that I desire to perform would conduce neither to my own harm, nor to the harm of others, nor to that of both myself and others.’ Then, skillful is this bodily action, entailing pleasure and producing happiness. Such bodily action you should perform.”*

Exhorting the Sāmaṇera Rāhula to use reflection during and after his actions, the *Buddha* said:

*“While you are performing an action with the body, of that particular action, you should reflect: ‘Now, is this action that I am performing with my body conducive to my own harm, or to the harm of others, or to that of both myself and others?’ Then, unskillful is this bodily action, entailing suffering and producing pain.*

*“If, when reflecting, you realize: ‘Now, this action that I am performing with my body is conducive to my own harm, or to the harm of others, or to that of both myself and others.’ Then, unskillful is this bodily action, entailing suffering and producing pain. From such a bodily action, you must desist!*

*“If, when reflecting, you should realize: ‘Now, this action that I am performing with my body is conducive neither to my own harm, nor to the harm of others, nor to that of both myself and others.’ Then, skillful is this bodily action, entailing pleasure and producing happiness. Such bodily action you should perform again and again!”*

The *Buddha* added:

*“If, when reflecting, you should realize: ‘Now, this action that I have performed is unskillful.’ Such an action should be confessed, revealed, and made manifest to the Teacher, or to the learned, or to your brothers of the Holy Life. Having confessed, you should acquire restraint in the future.”*

The admonition with regard to skillful and unskillful verbal and mental actions was treated in the same way.

Stating that constant reflection was essential for purification, the *Buddha* ended the discourse as follows:

*“Thus must you train yourself: by constantly reflecting shall we purify our bodily actions, by constantly reflecting shall we purify our verbal actions, by constantly reflecting shall we purify our mental actions.”*

In the *Sāmyutta Nikāya*, there is a special chapter in which the *Buddha* explains to Sāmaṇera Rāhula the transitory nature of all things.

Inasmuch as Venerable Rāhula entered the Order in his boyhood, the *Buddha* availed Himself of every opportunity to advise and guide him on the right path. The *Sutta Nipāta*<sup>153</sup> states that the *Buddha* repeatedly admonished him with the following stanzas:

*“Give up fivefold sensory pleasures — so sweet, so charming. Going forth from home life, with faith, be one who has put an end to suffering.*

*“Seek a remote lodging, secluded and noiseless. Be moderate in food.*

*“Have no attachment to robes, alms, requisites, and lodging.*

*“Do not come to this world again.*

*“Practice restraint with regard to the Fundamental Code and the five senses.*

*“Cultivate mindfulness as regards the body, and be full of dispassionate-ness.*

*“Avoid alluring, lust-provoking objects [of sense]. Develop your one-pointed, composed mind towards loathsomeness. Think not of the outward appearance of sense. Give up latent pride. Thus, eradicating pride, you shall fare on in perfect peace.”*

When Venerable Rāhula was eighteen years old, the *Buddha* delivered a profound discourse on mental culture to him, the occasion for it being a sense-desire that had arisen in Venerable Rāhula’s mind on account of his beautiful appearance. One day, Venerable Rāhula was following the *Buddha* in quest of alms. As the *Buddha* went along, followed

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<sup>153</sup> *Sutta Nipāta*, Rāhula Sutta.



by Rāhula, it seems that the pair was like an auspicious royal elephant and its noble offspring, or a royal swan and its beauteous cygnet, or a regal lion and its stately cub. Both were golden in complexion, almost equal in beauty, both of the Warrior Caste; both had renounced a throne. Rāhula, admiring the Teacher, thought: “I, too, am handsome like my parent, the Exalted One. Beautiful is the *Buddha*’s form, and mine is similar.”<sup>154</sup>

The *Buddha* instantly read Rāhula’s unwholesome thought and, looking back, addressed him thus: “Whatsoever form there is should be regarded thus: ‘This is not mine; this am I not; this is not my Self’.”

Rāhula submissively inquired of the *Buddha* whether he should only regard form as such.

The *Buddha* replied that he should regard all the five aggregates (*khandhas*) as such.

The Venerable Rāhula, having been admonished by the *Buddha*, preferred not to enter the village for alms. He turned back and sat at the foot of a tree, with crossed legs and body held erect, intent on mindfulness (*sati*).

Venerable Sāriputta, noting the meditative posture of Sāmaṇera Rāhula, advised him to concentrate on inhaling and exhaling, not knowing that he was practicing another subject of meditation (*kammaṭṭhāna*) on the instruction of the *Buddha*.

Venerable Rāhula was perplexed, because he had been given two different subjects of meditation — one by the *Buddha* and one by his own teacher. In obedience to his teacher, he concentrated on “breathing.” Afterwards, he went to the *Buddha* to get His instruction on the subject. As a wise physician would give the needed medicine, the *Buddha* first expanded His brief instruction on meditation on form and other aggregates, then briefly enumerated certain subjects of meditation with the specific unwholesome conditions temporarily eliminated by each, and finished by explaining the meditation on “breathing” (*ānāpānasati*).

Acting according to the *Buddha*’s instructions, Venerable Rāhula succeeded in his meditations, and, before long, upon hearing the Cuḷa Rāhulovāda Sutta,<sup>155</sup> he attained Arahantship.

In the fourteenth year after the Enlightenment of the *Buddha*, Sāmaṇera Rāhula received his Higher Ordination.

He predeceased the *Buddha* and Venerable Sāriputta.

Venerable Rāhula was distinguished for his high level of discipline. The following verses are attributed to him in the *Theragāthā*.<sup>156</sup>

“Being fortunate from both sides, they call me ‘Lucky Rāhula.’ I was the son of the *Buddha* and that of the Seer of Truths. Destroyed are all my Corruptions. There is no more rebirth to me. An Arahant am I, worthy of offering. Possessed of threefold knowledge and a seer of Deathless am I.”

<sup>154</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, Bhikkhuvagga, Mahā Rāhulovāda Sutta, no. 62.

<sup>155</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, Saḷāyatanavagga, Cuḷa Rāhulovāda Sutta, no. 147.

<sup>156</sup> *Khuddaka Nikāya*, Pārāyaṇavagga, *Theragāthā*, verses 297 and 298.



*“Blinded by sense-desires, spread over by a net, covered by a cloak of craving bound by the ‘kinsman of heedlessness’ was I like a fish caught in the mouth of a funnel-net. That sense-desire have I burnt. The bond of Māra have I cut. Eradicating craving from its root, cool am I, peaceful am I now.”*

### **The Buddha and His Half-Brother Nanda**

On the third day after the arrival of the *Buddha* at Kapilavatthu, Prince Nanda, the *Buddha*’s half-brother, the son of King Suddhodana and Queen Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī, was celebrating his consecration ceremony, marriage ceremony, and house-warming ceremony. It was on the occasion of these three festivals, when congratulations were being offered to the prince, that the *Buddha* visited the palace. After the meal, the *Buddha* handed His bowl to Nanda and, uttering a blessing, rose to go, without taking back the bowl.

Prince Nanda followed the *Buddha*, thinking that He would take the bowl from him at any moment. But the *Buddha* did not take it, and Nanda, out of reverence for the *Buddha*, continued to follow Him.

Janapada Kalyāṇi, to whom Nanda was betrothed, hearing that he was following the *Buddha* with bowl in hand, with tears running down her cheeks and her hair half-combed, ran after Prince Nanda and said to him: “Return quickly, O noble Lord!” These affectionate words penetrated his heart, and he was deeply moved, but, out of deference to the *Buddha*, he could not possibly return without giving back the bowl to Him. So, he accompanied the *Buddha* to the park owned by Nigrodha, which was the *Buddha*’s temporary residence. On arriving at the park, the *Buddha* questioned Nanda about whether he would become a monk. So great was Nanda’s reverence for Him as the *Buddha* and as his elder brother that, with reluctance, he agreed to be admitted into the Order.

But Nanda Bhikkhu did not enjoy any spiritual happiness resulting from renunciation. He was greatly depressed and was constantly thinking of his bride. He related his mental anguish to the *Bhikkhus*, saying: “Brothers, I am dissatisfied, I am now living the Religious Life, but I cannot endure to live the Holy Life any longer. I intend to abandon the higher precepts and return to the lower life, the life of a layman.”

Hearing about this, the *Buddha* questioned Venerable Nanda whether the report was true. Nanda admitted his weakness and stated that he was worried about his bride.

The *Buddha* then devised a means to set Nanda on the right path. With the object of showing him celestial nymphs, the *Buddha*, using His psychic powers, took Nanda to the Tāvātimsa Heaven. On the way, Venerable Nanda was shown a singed she-monkey who had lost her ears, nose, and tail in a fire, clinging to a burnt-up stump in a scorched field. Upon reaching the Tāvātimsa Heaven, the *Buddha* pointed to celestial nymphs and asked Nanda:

*“Nanda, which do you regard as being the more beautiful and fair to look upon and the more enticing, your noble wife Janapada Kalyāṇi or the celestial nymphs?”*

*“Venerable Sir, Janapada Kalyāṇi is like the singed monkey when compared to these celestial nymphs, who are infinitely more beautiful and fair.”*

*“Cheer up, Nanda. I guarantee that you will possess them if you continue as I instruct you.”*

*“In that case, I shall take the greatest pleasure in living the Holy Life.”*

Hearing that Venerable Nanda was living the Holy Life with the object of winning celestial nymphs, the other *Bhikkhus* ridiculed him, calling him “hireling.” Eventually, he became ashamed of his motive and, striving diligently, attained Arahantship. He thereupon approached the *Buddha* and said:

*“Venerable Sir, I release the Holy One from the promise that He made when He guaranteed that I should win celestial nymphs.”*

To which the *Buddha* replied:

*“When, Nanda, you ceased to cling to the things of this world and your heart was released from the Corruptions, at that moment, I released you from that promise.”*

The *Buddha* then uttered the following paean of joy:

*“He who has crossed over the mud and crushed the thorn of lust; he who has destroyed delusion, such a man is unmoved, whether in pleasure or in pain.”*

When some of the *Bhikkhus* doubted Nanda’s attainment of Arahantship, the *Buddha*, in explaining that he had indeed attained that exalted state, uttered the following stanzas:<sup>157</sup>

*“Just as rain seeps through an ill-thatched roof, so does lust<sup>158</sup> seep through an ill-trained mind.”<sup>159</sup>*

<sup>157</sup> *Dhammapada*, I, Twin Verses, verses 13—14.

<sup>158</sup> Not only lust, but all defilements (*kilesa*). There are ten defilements, thus called because they are themselves defiled and because they defile the mental factors (*cetasika*) associated with them. They are: (1) greed (*lobha*); (2) hatred (*dosa*); (3) delusion (*moha*); (4) conceit (*māna*); (5) wrong views (*micchā-diṭṭhi* or simply *diṭṭhi*); (6) speculative doubt (*vicikicchā*); (7) mental torpor (*thīna*); (8) restlessness (*middha*); (9) shamelessness (*ahirika*); and (10) lack of moral dread or unconscientiousness (*anottappa*). Cf. Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines* (4th revised edition; Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society [1980]), p. 103.

<sup>159</sup> A mind not cultivated in calm abiding (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassanā*) meditation.

*“Just as rain cannot seep through a well-thatched roof, so can lust not seep through a well-trained mind.”*

Enjoying the bliss of Emancipation, Nanda praised the Teacher, saying: “O excellent is the method of the Master, whereby I was drawn out of the mire of rebirth and set on *nibbāna*’s shore.”

The *Theragāthā* attributes the following verses to Nanda:

*“Through not reflecting rightly, I was attached to outward show.  
Overcome by passionate love, I was restless and fickle.*

*“Because of the skillful means devised by the Buddha, the ‘Kinsman of the Sun,’ I acted rightly and drew out my mind from existence.”*

Venerable Nanda was placed chief among disciples in respect of self-control.

## The Buddha and Ānanda

Ānanda,<sup>160</sup> a cousin of Prince Siddhattha, was the son of Amitodana, a younger brother of King Suddhodana. Inasmuch as he was born bringing happiness to all his kinsmen, he was named Ānanda.

In the second year of the *Buddha*’s ministry, Ānanda entered the Order along with the Sākya nobles Anuruddha, Bhaddiya, Bhagu, Kimbila, and Devadatta. Not long after, upon hearing a discourse from the Venerable Punna Mantāniputta, Venerable Ānanda attained the first stage of Sainthood (*Sotāpanna*).

<sup>160</sup> According to a story in the *Tipiṭaka*, Venerable Ānanda was a *paṇḍaka* in one of his previous lives. The Pāli term *paṇḍaka* has many meanings, and at least five, possibly six, different types of *paṇḍaka* are traditionally recognized. One type of *paṇḍaka*, specifically, an *āsittakapaṇḍaka*, refers to a man who gains satisfaction from performing oral sex on another man and from swallowing his semen or who only becomes sexually aroused after swallowing another man’s semen, thus, a male homosexual. A second type, specifically, an *ussuyāpaṇḍaka*, refers to a voyeur, that is, a person who gains sexual satisfaction from watching others have sex. A third type, specifically, an *opakkamikapaṇḍaka*, refers to eunuchs, that is, men who have been castrated, and, who, consequently, lack sexual organs. A *lūnapaṇḍaka*, which denotes a man who has been intentionally castrated, is a variant of the third type. A fourth type, specifically, a *napuṃsakapaṇḍaka*, refers to a person with no clearly defined genitals, whether male or female, having only a urinary tract, that is, a “neuter,” a person born without sexual organs. A fifth type, specifically, a *pakkhapaṇḍaka*, is the most controversial, since no one really knows for certain what is meant by the term. Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu refers to this type of *paṇḍaka* as “a half-time *paṇḍaka*” — one who is only a *paṇḍaka* during the waning moon. Buddhaghosa says that a *pakkhapaṇḍaka* “becomes temporarily impotent for fourteen ‘black days’ of the month but regains his potency during the fourteen ‘white days’, that is, from the new to the full moon.” Another interpretation is that *pakkhapaṇḍaka* refers to those with abnormal or uncontrollable desire for sexual intercourse, that is, what would nowadays be called a “sexaholic” or a “sex addict.” In any case, it is only the last three types of *paṇḍaka* (*opakkamikapaṇḍaka* “a eunuch,” *napuṃsakapaṇḍaka* “a person born without sexual organs,” *pakkhapaṇḍaka* “a sex addict; a sexaholic; a satyr; a nymphomaniac”) that are forbidden from being ordained, while no such restrictions are placed on the first two types (*āsittakapaṇḍaka* “male homosexual” and *ussuyāpaṇḍaka* “voyeur”).

When the *Buddha* was fifty-five years old, Venerable Ānanda became His chief attendant.

During the first twenty years after His Enlightenment, the *Buddha* had no permanent attendant. The few temporary attendants were not very dutiful, and their behavior was not highly commendable. One day, while residing at Jetavana,<sup>161</sup> the *Buddha* addressed the *Bhikkhus* and said:

*“Now I am old, Bhikkhus. When I say: ‘Let us go this way,’ some go by another way; some drop my bowl and robe to the ground. Choose out one disciple to attend upon me always.”*<sup>162</sup>

Immediately, all of the *Bhikkhus*, from Venerable Sāriputta downward, volunteered their services, but the *Buddha* declined their kind offer. Since Venerable Ānanda had remained silent, he was urged by the *Bhikkhus* to offer his services as well. When asked, Ānanda replied that he would accept the position only if the *Buddha* agreed to the following eight conditions:

1. The *Buddha* should not give him robes which He Himself had received.
2. The *Buddha* should not give him food which He had received.
3. The *Buddha* should not allow him to dwell in the same Fragrant Chamber.
4. The *Buddha* should not take him with Him wherever the *Buddha* is invited.
5. The *Buddha* should kindly go with him wherever he is invited.
6. The *Buddha* should kindly give him permission to introduce visitors who came from afar to see the *Buddha*.
7. The *Buddha* should kindly grant him permission to approach Him whenever any doubt should arise.
8. The *Buddha* should kindly repeat to him any discourses that were spoken in his absence.

Without the slightest hesitation, the *Buddha* agreed to these four negative and four positive conditions. Thenceforth, Venerable Ānanda acted as His favorite attendant for twenty-five years, till the *Buddha*’s last moment. Like a shadow, Venerable Ānanda followed the *Buddha* everywhere, attending to all His needs with great love and care. Both during day and night, his services were always at the disposal of his Master. At night, it is stated that Venerable Ānanda used to go round the *Buddha*’s Fragrant

<sup>161</sup> Literally, “Jeta’s Grove” — Prince Jeta’s pleasure park at Sāvattihī, which was bought for the use of the *Buddha* and His disciples by the millionaire Anāthapiṇḍika. The *Buddha* spent the better part of the last twenty-five years of His life at Sāvattihī at the Jetavana Monastery built by Anāthapiṇḍika.

<sup>162</sup> *Khuddaka Nikāya*, Pārāyaṇavagga, *Jātaka*, no. 456. The collection of *Jātakas*, “birth stories,” forms the tenth book of the *Khuddaka Nikāya*. The *Jātakas* claim to be accounts of former lives of the *Buddha*. The collection consists of approximately 2500 verses arranged numerically. Originally, there were 550 *Jātakas*, but only 547 have survived, though the names and numbers of the lost *Jātakas* are still known. A long introduction, called *Nidānakathā*, precedes the *Jātakas* proper. In it, the life of the *Buddha* is told in prose interspersed with verses drawn from the *Buddhavamsa*, the fourteenth book of the *Khuddaka Nikāya*.

Chamber nine times with staff and torch in hand to keep himself awake and to prevent the *Buddha's* sleep from being disturbed.

### Ānanda Bodhi-Tree

It was Venerable Ānanda who was responsible for the planting of the Ānanda Bodhi-Tree. Devout followers used to bring flowers and garlands, lay them at the entrance to the *Buddha's* Fragrant Chamber, and depart with much rejoicing. The millionaire Anāthapiṇḍika came to hear of this and requested Venerable Ānanda to ask the *Buddha* whether there was a possibility of finding a place where His devotees might pay reverence to the *Buddha* when He was away on His teaching tours. Consequently, Venerable Ānanda approached the *Buddha* and asked:

*“Lord, how many objects of reverence are there, may it please you?”*

*“There are three, Ānanda. They are objects of reverence pertaining to the body,<sup>163</sup> objects of reverence pertaining to personal use, and objects of reverence reminiscent of the Buddha.”*

*“Is it proper, Lord, to construct a cetiya<sup>164</sup> while you are alive?”*

*“No, not an object of reverence pertaining to the body, which it is only proper to erect after the passing away of the Buddha. An object of reverence reminiscent of the Buddha has no physical basis — it is purely mental. But the great bodhi-tree, used by the Buddha, whether He is alive or dead, is an object of reverence.”*

*“Lord, when you go on your teaching tours, the great monastery at Jetavana is without refuge, and people find no object of reverence. Lord, may I bring a seed from the great bodhi-tree and plant it at the entrance to the Jetavana?”*

*“Very well, Ānanda, plant it. It will then be as if I constantly abide in Jetavana.”*

Venerable Ānanda mentioned this matter to the *Buddha's* principal lay supporters — Anāthapiṇḍika, Visākhā, and King Pasenadi of Kosala — and requested the Venerable Moggallāna to secure a seed from the great *bodhi-tree*. Venerable Moggallāna readily consented and obtained a seed from the tree and delivered it to Venerable Ānanda. Venerable Ānanda presented this to King Pasenadi, who then handed it to Anāthapiṇḍika. Thereupon, Anāthapiṇḍika stirred up the fragrant soil and dropped the seed in a hole that

<sup>163</sup> Such as bodily relics of the *Buddha*.

<sup>164</sup> Sanskrit *caitya*, a *stūpa*; a burial mound containing the ashes or relics of an important person. At first, a *cetiya* was simply a mound of earth. Later, the mound was encased in bricks. Some are very small, while others are quite large. All are built on the same basic pattern. In Śri Lanka, a *cetiya* is called a “*dagoba*.” In Nepal, they appeared early as pagodas and, from there, passed into China and Japan. In Tibet, a *cetiya* is called a “*chörten*.” Cf. Christmas Humphreys, *A Popular Dictionary of Buddhism* (London: Curzon Press [1984]), p. 187.

had been dug. The tree that sprang up in that place was known as the Ānanda Bodhi-Tree.<sup>165</sup>

### Ānanda, “Custodian of the Dhamma”

Inasmuch as he possessed a remarkably powerful memory, and inasmuch as he had the rare privilege of listening to all the discourses of the *Buddha* owing to his close association with Him, he was later appointed the Custodian of the *Dhamma* (*Dhamma-bhaṇḍagārika*). Referring to his own knowledge of the *Dhamma* in a reply to a question posed by a Brahmin, Venerable Ānanda said:<sup>166</sup>

*“I recited eighty-two thousand from the Buddha and two thousand from the Bhikkhus. There exist eighty-four thousand discourses in all.”*

The *Buddha* ranked Venerable Ānanda foremost among His disciples in five respects: erudition (*bahussutānam*), retentive memory (*satimantānam*), good behavior (*gatimantānam*), steadfastness (*dhitimantānam*), and ministering care (*upaṭṭhakānam*).<sup>167</sup>

Though a distinguished disciple, well-versed in the *Dhamma*, Venerable Ānanda lived as a “learner” (*sekha*) till the death of the *Buddha*. The *Buddha*’s final exhortation to him was:

*“You have done merit in the past, Ānanda. Quickly be free from corruptions.”*<sup>168</sup>

It was only after the passing away of the *Buddha* that Venerable Ānanda attained Arahantship. Inasmuch as he was expected to take a leading part in the First Council, which was composed only of *Arahants*, he made a strenuous effort and attained Arahantship on the night preceding the Convocation, while he was about to lie down on his couch. It is thus stated that he was the only disciple to attain Arahantship free from the postures of sitting, standing, walking, or sleeping.

Venerable Ānanda passed away at the age of one hundred twenty. The *Dhammapada* Commentary states that, since people on both sides of the river Rohiṇī were of equal service to him and since both sides vied with each other to possess his relics, he sat cross-legged in the air over the middle of the river, preached the *Dhamma* to the crowds that had gathered, and wished that his body would split in two, with one part falling on the near side of the river and another on the far side. He then entered into the ecstatic meditation on the element of fire (*tejakasiṇa samāpati*). Instantly, flames of fire issued forth from his body, and, as willed, one portion of his body fell on the near side of the river and the other on the far side.

<sup>165</sup> This ancient sacred tree is still to be seen at modern Sahet Mahet (Sāvattihī) in India.

<sup>166</sup> *Khuddaka Nikāya*, Pārāyaṇavagga, *Theragāthā*, verse 1424.

<sup>167</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya*, part I.

<sup>168</sup> *Dīgha Nikāya*, Parinibbāna Sutta.



The *Theragāthā* gives several stanzas uttered by Venerable Ānanda on various occasions. The following verses, which deal with the frailty of this so-called “beautiful body,” are particularly interesting:<sup>169</sup>

“Behold this lovely body,<sup>170</sup> this mass of sores, supported by bones, subject to illness, highly thought of.<sup>171</sup> Indeed, this body is neither permanent nor enduring.”

### Ānanda and Women

It was also Venerable Ānanda who persuaded the *Buddha* to admit women into the Order. Had it not been for his intervention, Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī would not have succeeded in becoming a *Bhikkhunī*. The *Bhikkhunīs* held Venerable Ānanda in high esteem, and his sermons were greatly appreciated by them.

On one occasion, Venerable Ānanda approached the *Buddha* and asked Him:

“How are we to conduct ourselves, Lord, with regard to women?”

“As not seeing them, Ānanda.”

“But if we do see them, Lord, what are we to do?”

“Do not talk to them, Ānanda.”

“But if they speak to us, Lord, what are we to do?”

“Be watchful, Ānanda.”

This general exhortation was given to *Bhikkhus* so that they might constantly be watchful in their dealings with women.

### The Buddha and Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī

Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī was the youngest sister of King Suppabuddha. Her elder sister was Queen Mahā Māyā. Both were married to King Suddhodana. She had a daughter named Nandā and a son named Nanda. Later, both of them entered the Order. When Mahā Māyā died, Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī adopted her sister’s son, Prince Siddhattha, entrusting her own son, Nanda, to the care of nurses.

Her family name was Gotamī, and she was named Mahā Pajāpatī because soothsayers predicted that she would be the head of a large following.

When the *Buddha* visited the palace and preached the *Dhammapāla Jātaka*, Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī attained the first stage of Sainthood.<sup>172</sup>

<sup>169</sup> *Khuddaka Nikāya*, Pārāyaṇavagga, *Theragāthā*, verse 1020; *Dhammapada*, XI, Old Age, verse 147.

<sup>170</sup> Made lovely, beautiful, attractive on account of clothing, jewelry, perfume, etc.

<sup>171</sup> As being good and pleasant.

<sup>172</sup> *Sotāpanna*.



After the death of King Suddhodana, since both Prince Siddhattha and Prince Nanda had renounced the world, she also decided to enter the Noble Order and lead the Holy Life. When the *Buddha* visited Kapilavatthu to settle a dispute between the Sākyas and Koliyas with regard to the irrigation of channels from the river Rohiṇī and was residing at the Nigrodha Park, Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī approached the *Buddha* and begged Him to grant permission for women to enter the Order, thus:<sup>173</sup>

*“It would be well, Lord, if women should be allowed to renounce their homes and enter the homeless state under the doctrine and discipline proclaimed by the Tathāgata.”*

Without stating His reasons, the *Buddha* instantly refused, saying:

*“Enough, O Gotamī, let it not please you that women should be allowed to do so.”*

For the second and third time, Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī repeated her request, and the *Buddha* gave the same reply.

Later, the *Buddha*, after having stayed at Kapilavatthu as long as He liked, traveled to Vesālī and, arriving there in due course, stayed at the Mahāvana in the Kūtāgāra Hall.

Resolute, Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī, without being discouraged by the *Buddha*’s refusal of her request, had her hair cut off, donned saffron-colored garments, and, accompanied by a great number of Sākyan ladies, walked from Kapilavatthu to Vesālī, a distance of about 150 miles, experiencing many hardships along the way. With swollen feet, her body covered with dust, she arrived at Vesālī and stood outside the porch of the Pinnacled Hall. Thereupon, Venerable Ānanda found her weeping and, learning the cause of her grief, approached the *Buddha* and said:

*“Behold, Lord, Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī is standing outside on the porch with swollen feet, body covered with dust, and sad. Please permit women to renounce home and enter the homeless state under the doctrine and discipline proclaimed by the Exalted One. It would be well, Lord, if women were allowed to renounce their homes and enter the homeless state.”*

*“Enough, Ānanda, let it not please you that women should be allowed to do so.”*

For the second and third time, Venerable Ānanda interceded on their behalf, but the *Buddha* would not yield. Thereupon, Venerable Ānanda tried a different approach and respectfully questioned the *Buddha*:

<sup>173</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya*, Part IV.

*“Are women, Lord, capable of realizing the state of Stream-Winner (Sotāpanna), Once-Returner (Sakadāgāmī), Non-Returner (Anāgāmī), and Arahant when they have gone forth from home to the homeless state under the doctrine and discipline proclaimed by the Exalted One?”*

The *Buddha* replied that they were indeed capable of realizing the four stages of Sainthood.

Encouraged by this favorable reply, Venerable Ānanda appealed again, saying:

*“If then, Lord, they are capable of attaining Sainthood, since Mahā Pajāpati Gotamī had been of great service to the Exalted One, when, as aunt and nurse, she nourished Him and gave Him milk, and, on the death of His mother, suckled the Exalted One at her own breast, it would be well, Lord, if women were given permission to renounce the world and enter the homeless state under the doctrine and discipline proclaimed by the Tathāgata.”*

Finally yielding to the entreaties of Venerable Ānanda, the *Buddha* replied:

*“If, Ānanda, Mahā Pajāpati Gotamī accepts the Eight Chief Rules, let that be reckoned to her as the form of her ordination.”*

The Eight Chief Rules<sup>174</sup> are as follows:

1. A *Bhikkhunī*, even of a hundred years' standing by *upasampadā*,<sup>175</sup> should salute a *Bhikkhu*, rise up before him, reverence him, and perform all proper duties towards him, even if he had received the Higher Ordination that very day.
2. A *Bhikkhunī* should not spend a retreat (*vassa*) in a place where there is no *Bhikkhu*.
3. Every fortnight, a *Bhikkhunī* should ask from the Order of *Bhikkhus* the time of *Uposatha*<sup>176</sup> meeting and when a *Bhikkhu* will come to admonish them.
4. The *parāvāṇa*<sup>177</sup> ceremony after the Retreat should be held by a *Bhikkhunī* in the presence of both *Bhikkhus* and *Bhikkhunīs* (to inquire whether, through the three ways of seeing, hearing, or suspicion, a wrong has been done).
5. A *Bhikkhunī* who has committed a major offense should undergo *mānatta*<sup>178</sup> discipline in the presence of both the Order of *Bhikkhus* and *Bhikkhunīs*.
6. A female novice (*sikkhamānā*), who has trained in the Six Rules for two years, should receive the Higher Ordination from the Order of *Bhikkhus* and *Bhikkhunīs*.
7. A *Bhikkhunī* should on no account rebuke or abuse a *Bhikkhu*.

<sup>174</sup> Some of these rules will not be intelligible to lay readers inasmuch as they pertain to *Vinaya* Discipline.

<sup>175</sup> The Higher Ordination.

<sup>176</sup> The full moon and new moon days when the *Bhikkhus* assemble to recite their Fundamental Rules.

<sup>177</sup> The formal termination of the rainy season.

<sup>178</sup> A form of disciplinary action.

8. Henceforth, *Bhikkhunīs* should not give admonition to *Bhikkhus*, but *Bhikkhus* should admonish *Bhikkhunīs*.

These rules are to be revered, revered, honored, and respected as long as life lasts and should not be transgressed.

When Venerable Ānanda mentioned them to Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī, she gladly agreed to abide by those Eight Chief Rules. Upon their acceptance, she automatically received the Higher Ordination.

In founding the Order of *Bhikkhunīs*, the *Buddha*, foreseeing the future repercussions, remarked:

*“If, Ānanda, women had not received permission to renounce the world and enter the homeless state under the doctrine and discipline proclaimed by the Tathāgata, the Holy Life would have lasted long and the Sublime Dhamma would have survived for a thousand years. But, since women have entered the homeless state, the Holy Life will not last long, and the Sublime Dhamma will now remain only for five hundred years.”*<sup>179</sup>

The *Buddha* added:

*“Just as, Ānanda, houses in which there are many women and but few men are easily violated by burglars, even so, under whatsoever doctrine and discipline women are permitted to renounce the world and enter the homeless state, that Holy Life will not last long.*

*“And, just as a man would, in anticipation, build an embankment to a great reservoir beyond which the water should not overflow, even so have I, in anticipation, laid down these Eight Chief Rules for the Bhikkhunīs, not to be transgressed throughout their lives.”*<sup>180</sup>

In making these comments, which, in general, may not be very palatable to modern-day feminists, the *Buddha* was not in any way disparaging women but was only dealing with the realities of contemporary Indian society. Although, for very valid reasons, the *Buddha* only reluctantly permitted women to enter the Order, it should be noted that it was also the *Buddha* who, for the first time in the history of the world, founded an Order for women with rules and regulations. Just as the *Buddha* appointed two chief male disciples — Venerable Sāriputta and Venerable Moggallāna — for the Order of *Bhikkhus*, He appointed two chief female disciples — Venerable Khemā and Venerable Uppalavannā — for the Order of *Bhikkhunīs* as well.

<sup>179</sup> *Vinaya Piṭaka*, Cullavaga, 10 (the ordination and instruction of *Bhikkhunīs*); *Anguttara Nikāya*, Part IV, 8:51.

<sup>180</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya*, Part IV, 8.

One day, Bhikkhunī Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī approached the *Buddha* and invited Him to deliver a discourse so that she might strive alone and achieve her goal. To which, the *Buddha* declared:

*“Of whatsoever doctrine you shall be conscious, O Gotamī, that these things lead to passion and not to peace, to pride and not to veneration, to wishing for much and not to wishing for little, to love of society and not to seclusion, to laziness and not to the exercise of zeal, to being difficult to satisfy and not to contentment, truly, may you then, O Gotamī, bear in mind: this is not Dhamma, this is not Vinaya, this is not the Teaching of the Master. But, of whatsoever doctrine you shall be conscious, O Gotamī, that these things lead to peace and not to passion, to veneration and not to pride, to wishing for little and not to wishing for much, to seclusion and not to love of society, to the exercise of zeal and not to laziness, to contentment and not to being difficult to satisfy, truly, may you then bear in mind: this is Dhamma, this is Vinaya, this is the Teaching of the Master.”*<sup>181</sup>

Before long, Venerable Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī attained Arahantship, accompanied by intuitive and analytical knowledge (*paṭisambhidā*).<sup>182</sup>

The other Sākyan women, who had received their ordination at the same time as Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī, also attained Arahantship in due course.

Among female disciples, Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī was assigned the foremost place in seniority and experience (*rattaññu*). Several verses uttered by her after she attained Arahantship appear in the *Therīgāthā*. ■

### Further Reading

Nārada Mahāthera. 1988. *The Buddha and His Teachings*. 4th edition. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Buddhist Missionary Society.

Nyanaponika Thera and Hellmuth Hecker. 1997. *Great Disciples of the Buddha: Their Lives, Their Works, Their Legacy*. Edited with an Introduction by Bhikkhu Bodhi. Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications.

<sup>181</sup> *Vinaya Piṭaka*, Part III, Parivāra.

<sup>182</sup> Analytical knowledge with regard to the meaning (*attha*), texts (*dhamma*), etymology (*nirutti*), and the understanding of these three (*paṭibhāna*).

# 9

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## The Buddha's Chief Opponents And Supporters

*"As a solid rock cannot be moved by the wind, the wise are not shaken<sup>183</sup>  
by praise or blame."*<sup>184 185</sup>

*"There is an old saying, Atula<sup>186</sup> — it is not just of today: 'People  
will blame you if you say too much; they will blame you if you say too  
little; they will blame you if you say just enough.' No one escapes blame  
in this world.*

*"There never was, there never will be, nor is there now anyone  
who receives all praise or all blame."*<sup>187</sup>

### Introduction

The *Buddha* worked disinterestedly for the welfare of mankind, making no distinction between the rich and the poor, the high and the low. His followers and supporters were drawn both from the highest and lowest rungs of the social ladder. So spontaneous was the love and so profound was the veneration of the people that kings and nobles, millionaires and paupers, the pious and courtesans, men and women of every imaginable caste, class, and social condition, vied with one another to be of service to Him and to make His noble mission a success. The wealthy spent lavishly to erect suitable monasteries for Him, while the poor, full of faith, demonstrated their piety in their humble way. With perfect equanimity, He accepted the gifts of the rich and the poor, but showed no partiality to any. Nevertheless, He showed more compassion to the

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<sup>183</sup> Not perturbed or bothered.

<sup>184</sup> When they are confronted by the eight worldly conditions, the wise are neither attracted nor repulsed, neither happy nor sad, neither elated nor depressed. To them, things and events simply are what they are, no more, no less. The eight worldly conditions are: (1) gain (*lābha*) and (2) loss (*alābha*); (3) fame (*yasa*) and (4) infamy or ill-repute (*ayasa*); (5) praise (*paraṃsā*) and (6) blame (*nindā*); and (7) happiness (*sukha*) and (8) pain (*dukkha*).

<sup>185</sup> *Dhammapada*, VI, The Wise, verse 81.

<sup>186</sup> Atula was a *Bhikkhu* who stood at the door for alms without asking.

<sup>187</sup> *Dhammapada*, XVII, Anger, verses 227—228.

poor and the lowly. Like a bee that extracts honey from a flower without hurting it, He lived among His followers and supporters without causing the slightest inconvenience to any. Offerings of diverse kinds were showered upon Him, and He accepted them all with perfect non-attachment.

Though absolutely pure in motive and perfectly selfless in His service to humanity, yet, in preaching and spreading His Teaching, the *Buddha* had to contend with strong opposition. He was severely criticized, roughly abused, insulted and ruthlessly attacked, as no other religious leader had been. His chief opponents were ordinary teachers whose traditional doctrines and superstitious rites and ceremonies He justly criticized. His greatest personal enemy, who made a vain attempt to kill Him, was His own brother-in-law and former disciple, Devadatta.

### **The Buddha and Devadatta**

Devadatta was the son of King Suppabuddha and Pamitā, an aunt of the *Buddha*. Yasodharā was his sister. He was thus both a cousin and brother-in-law of the *Buddha*. He entered the Order in the early part of the *Buddha*'s ministry, together with Ānanda and other Sākya Princes. He could not attain any of the stages of Sainthood but was distinguished for possessing worldly psychic powers (*pothujjanika-iddhi*). One of his chief supporters was King Ajātasattu, who built a monastery for him.

During the early part of his career, Devadatta led such an exemplary life that even Venerable Sāriputta went about Rājagaha praising him. Later, overcome by the desire for worldly gain and honor, and growing jealous of the *Buddha*, Devadatta became so radically changed in his character that he proved to be the greatest personal enemy of the *Buddha*. Simultaneous with the arising of ill will in his heart towards the *Buddha*, his psychic powers ceased.

Despite his evil ways and corrupt life, he had a large following and many admirers, and some even preferred him to Venerable Sāriputta.

On one occasion, Devadatta approached the *Buddha* and asked Him to hand over the leadership of the *Sangha* to him inasmuch as the *Buddha* was advanced in age. The *Buddha* immediately refused, saying: "I would not even hand over the [leadership of the] *Sangha* to Sāriputta or Moggallāna. Why, then, would I hand it over to you?" Devadatta was enraged at this refusal and vowed vengeance. To safeguard and maintain the dignity of the *Sangha*, the *Buddha* made a proclamation that Devadatta alone was responsible for anything done by him in the name of the *Buddha*, the *Dhamma*, or the *Sangha*.

Devadatta therefore conspired with King Ajātasattu to kill the *Buddha*. Ajātasattu was advised to kill his father and usurp the throne, while Devadatta decided to kill the *Buddha* and lead the *Sangha*. The ungrateful Ajātasattu succeeded in killing his devout father, King Bimbisāra, and Devadatta hired bowmen to kill the *Buddha*, but, contrary to his expectations, the bowmen became followers of the *Buddha*. Foiled in his attempt, he decided to kill the *Buddha* himself. When the *Buddha* was walking back and forth in the shade of the Vulture Peak, Devadatta climbed the Peak and mercilessly hurled a rock at

the *Buddha*. Fortunately, it struck another piece of rock, and a splinter slightly wounded the *Buddha's* foot, causing blood to flow. Jīvaka the physician attended on the *Buddha* and healed Him.

Devadatta made another unsuccessful attempt to kill the *Buddha* by dispatching the elephant Nālāgiri, after getting him intoxicated with liquor, to trample the Teacher. When the ferocious elephant approached the *Buddha*, Venerable Ānanda stepped forward to sacrifice his own life for the sake of his Master, but the *Buddha* subdued the beast through the power of His loving-kindness (*mettā*).

After this last wicked act, Devadatta became extremely unpopular, and public opinion was so much against him that King Ajātasattu was compelled to withdraw his support. Devadatta fell into disrepute, and his followers decreased.

Devadatta now decided to live by deceit. His fertile brain devised another seemingly peaceful plan. With the help of equally evil-minded *Bhikkhus* like Kokālika, he thought of causing a schism in the Order.

He asked the *Buddha* to enforce the following five rules among the *Bhikkhus*:

1. That monks should dwell their entire lives in the forest.
2. That they should live on alms begged.
3. That they should only wear *pāṃsukūla* robes.<sup>188</sup>
4. That they should live at the foot of a tree.
5. That they should not eat fish or flesh throughout their life.

This he did, knowing full well that the *Buddha* would not agree to these rules. Devadatta wanted to make the *Buddha's* refusal a pretext for disparaging the *Buddha* and thereby winning the support of the ignorant masses.

When this request was made, the compassionate and tolerant *Buddha* declared that His disciples were free to adopt these rules or not, but He would not make them compulsory for all.

Devadatta then made this refusal a cause for schism in the Order. He appealed to the *Bhikkhus*, saying: “Brothers, whose words are nobler, the words of the *Tathāgata* or the words which I myself have uttered? Whoever desires release from suffering, let him come with me.”

A number of newly-ordained *Bhikkhus*, who were not yet conversant with the *Dhamma*, apparently approved of his demands and went over to him. Accompanied by them, Devadatta went to Gayāsisa. But Venerable Sāriputta and Venerable Moggallāna, on the advice of the *Buddha*, went there and succeeded in winning these *Bhikkhus* back, after explaining the *Dhamma* to them.

Thereafter, evil days fell upon Devadatta. He became grievously ill, and, before his death, he sincerely repented and desired to see the *Buddha*. But his bad *kamma* interfered, and he died a miserable death. However, he sought refuge in the *Buddha* at the last moment.

<sup>188</sup> That is, robes made from rags collected from the dust-heap and cemeteries.



Although he suffers in a woeful state for his heinous crimes, yet, as a result of the Holy Life he led during the early part of his career, it is stated that he will become a *Pacceka Buddha* named Atthissara in the distant future.

### Anāthapiṇḍika

The chief supporter of the *Buddha* was Anāthapiṇḍika the millionaire. Among the *Buddha*'s lay followers, he was considered the foremost alms-giver (*dāyaka*).

The original name of Anāthapiṇḍika, which means "Feeder of the helpless," was Sudatta. Owing to his unparalleled generosity, he was subsequently known by his new name. His birthplace was Sāvattḥī.

One day, Sudatta visited his brother-in-law in Rājagaha to transact some business. His brother-in-law did not come forward as usual to welcome him. Instead, Sudatta found him in the backyard making preparations for a feast. On inquiry, to his indescribable joy, he learned that these arrangements were being made to entertain the *Buddha* on the following day. The utterance of the mere word "*Buddha*" roused his interest, and he longed to see Him. Since he was told that the *Buddha* was living nearby in the Sītavana Forest and that he could see Him the following morning, Sudatta went to bed. However, his desire to see the *Buddha* was so intense that he could not sleep, and he arose at an unusual hour in the morning to set out for the Sītavana Forest. It appears that his faith in the *Buddha* was so intense that a light emanated from his body. On his way to the Sītavana Forest, he had to pass through a cemetery. It was pitch dark. He became afraid and thought of turning back. Then Sīvaka, a Yakkha, himself invisible, encouraged Sudatta, saying:<sup>189</sup>

*"A hundred elephants and horses too,  
Aye, and a hundred chariots drawn by mules,  
A hundred thousand maidens, with bejeweled rings  
In their ears — all are not worth  
The sixteenth fraction of a single stride.  
Advance, O citizen, go forward!  
Advance for you is better than retreat."*

Thereupon, his fear vanished, and faith in the *Buddha* arose in its place. The light appeared again, and he courageously hurried on his way. Nevertheless, the same thing happened a second time and yet a third time. Ultimately, he reached the Sītavana Forest, where the *Buddha* was pacing back and forth in the open air anticipating Sudatta's visit. The *Buddha* addressed him by his family name, Sudatta, and called him to His presence.

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<sup>189</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, Part I.

Anāthapiṇḍika was pleased to hear the *Buddha* address him in this manner and respectfully inquired whether the *Buddha* had rested happily. The *Buddha* replied:<sup>190</sup>

*“Surely, the Arahant in whom all fire is extinct rests happily at all times. Calm is the entire being of he who does not cling to sensory desires. Rid of all the seeds that bring new life, all encumbrances cut out, subdued the pain and pining of the heart, calm and serene, he rests happily, for, in his mind, he has attained to peace.”*

Hearing the *Dhamma*, Anāthapiṇḍika became a *Sotāpanna* (Stream-Winner) and invited the *Buddha* to spend the rainy season at Sāvaththī. The *Buddha* accepted the invitation, suggesting that *Buddhas* take pleasure in solitude. Anāthapiṇḍika returned to Sāvaththī, bought the park belonging to Prince Jeta at a price determined, so the story goes, by covering the site with a hundred thousand gold coins. However, there were not quite enough coins to cover the entire area, and a small space near the gate remained uncovered. Anāthapiṇḍika ordered that more gold coins be fetched to complete the task. Whereupon, Prince Jeta told him that there was no need to cover the space since it would be his gift. Anāthapiṇḍika erected the famous Jetavana Monastery on the site at a great cost. Here, the *Buddha* spent nineteen rainy seasons. This monastery, where the *Buddha* spent a major part of His life, was the place where He delivered many of His discourses.

At one time, the *Buddha*, discoursing on generosity, reminded Anāthapiṇḍika that alms given to the Order of monks, together with the *Buddha*, is very meritorious; but more meritorious than such alms is the building of a monastery for the use of the Order; more meritorious than building such monasteries is seeking refuge in the *Buddha*, the *Dhamma*, and the *Sangha*; more meritorious than seeking refuge in the *Buddha*, the *Dhamma*, and the *Sangha* is the observance of the five precepts; more meritorious than such observance is meditation on loving-kindness (*mettā*) for a moment; and most meritorious of all is the development of Insight (*vipassanā*) into the fleeting nature of all things.<sup>191</sup>

It is evident from this discourse that generosity (*dāna*) is the first stage on the way to the Buddhist life. More important than generosity is taking refuge (*saraṇa*) in the *Buddha*, the *Dhamma*, and the *Sangha*. More important than taking refuge is the observance of at least the five rules (*pañca-sīla*) regulating behavior, which tend to the disciplining of words and deeds. Still more important and more beneficial is the cultivation of such ennobling virtues as loving-kindness (*mettā*), which lead to self-development. Most important and most beneficial of all self-discipline is the sincere effort to understand things as they truly are.

Commenting on the four kinds of joy, or happiness (*sukha*), that a lay follower may experience, the *Buddha* declared:<sup>192</sup>

<sup>190</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, Part I.

<sup>191</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya*, Part IV.

<sup>192</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya*, Part II.

*“There are four kinds of joy to be gained by the householder who enjoys sensory pleasures from time to time, when occasion offers — the joy of ownership (atthisukha), the joy of wealth (bhogasukha), the joy of debtlessness (ananasukha), and the joy of blamelessness (anavajjasukha).*

*“What is the joy of ownership? Herein, a clansman has wealth acquired by earnest striving, amassed by strength of arm, gained by sweat, lawful, and lawfully gotten. At the thought, ‘Wealth is mine, acquired by energetic striving, lawfully,’ joy comes to him, satisfaction comes to him. This is called ‘the joy of ownership.’*

*“What is the joy of wealth? Herein, a clansman, by means of wealth acquired by energetic striving, both enjoys his wealth and does meritorious deeds with it. At the thought, ‘By means of wealth acquired, I both enjoy my wealth and do meritorious deeds,’ joy comes to him, satisfaction comes to him. This is called ‘the joy of wealth.’*

*“What is the joy of debtlessness? Herein, a clansman owes no debt, great or small, to anyone. At the thought, ‘I owe no debt, great or small, to anyone,’ joy comes to him, satisfaction comes to him. This is called ‘the joy of debtlessness.’*

*“What is the joy of blamelessness? Herein, a noble disciple is blessed with blameless action of body, blameless action of speech, and blameless action of mind. At the thought, ‘I am blessed with blameless action of body, speech, and mind,’ joy comes to him, satisfaction comes to him. This is called ‘the joy of blamelessness.’*

*“Experiencing the joy of debtlessness, a man may then recall the joy of really having. When he experiences the joy of wealth, he sees that it is such by wisdom. When he sees, he knows. Thus is he wise, indeed, in both respects. But these do not have one-sixteenth of the joy [that comes to a man] of blamelessness.”*

On another occasion, when the *Buddha* visited the house of Anāthapiṇḍika, He heard an unusual uproar in the house and asked Anāthapiṇḍika what the commotion was all about. Anāthapiṇḍika replied:

*“Lord, it is Sujātā, my daughter-in-law, who lives with us. She is rich and has been brought here from a wealthy family. She pays no heed to her mother-in-law or her father-in-law, nor to her husband. Neither does she venerate, reverence, honor, nor respect the Exalted One.”*

The *Buddha* called her to His presence and preached an illuminating discourse<sup>193</sup> on seven kinds of wives that exist even in modern society as it was in days of old.

<sup>193</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya*, Part IV.

*"Whosoever is wicked in mind, ill-disposed, pitiless, fond of other [men], neglecting husband, a prostitute, bent on harassing, such a one is called 'a troublesome wife.'*

*"Whosoever wishes to squander whatever profit, though little, that the husband gains, whether by craft, trade, or plow, such a one is called 'a thievish wife.'*

*"Whosoever is not inclined to anything, who is lazy, gluttonous, harsh, cruel, and fond of bad speech, who is domineering and unremitting, such a one is called 'a lordly wife.'*

*"Whosoever is ever kind and compassionate, who protects her husband as a mother would protect her son, who guards the accumulated wealth of her husband, such a one is called 'a motherly wife.'*

*"Whosoever is respectful towards her husband, just as a younger sister towards her elder brother, who is modest, who lives in accordance with her husband's wishes, such a one is called 'a sisterly wife.'*

*"Whosoever rejoices at the sight of her husband, even as a friend on seeing a companion who has come after a long time, who is of noble birth, virtuous, and chaste, such a one is called 'a friendly wife.'*

*"Whosoever, when threatened with harm and punishment, is not angry but calm, who endures all things of her husband with no wicked heart, who is free from hatred, who lives in accordance with her husband's wishes, such a one is called 'a handmaid wife'."*

The *Buddha*, describing the characteristics of seven kinds of wives, remarked that, of them, the troublesome wife (*vadhakabhariyā*), the thievish wife (*corabhariyā*), and the lordly wife (*ayyabhariyā*) are bad and undesirable ones, while the motherly wife (*mātubhariyā*), the sisterly wife (*bhaginibhariyā*), the friendly wife (*sakhībhariyā*), and the handmaid wife (*dāsibhariyā*) are good and praiseworthy ones.

*"These, Sujātā, are the seven kinds of wives a man may have; and which of them are you?"*

*"Lord, let the Exalted One think of me as the handmaid wife from this day forward."*

Anāthapiṇḍika used to visit the *Buddha* daily and, finding that people would go away disappointed when the *Buddha* was not present, wished to know from Venerable Ānanda whether there was a possibility for the devout followers to pay their respects when the *Buddha* went out on His preaching tours. The matter was reported to the *Buddha*, with the result that the Ānanda Bodhi-tree, which stands to this day, was planted at the entrance to the monastery.

Puñṇalakkhaṇā, a very virtuous lady, was Anāthapiṇḍika's wife. Mahā Subhaddā, Cūlā Subhaddā, and Sumanā were his three devout daughters. The two elder daughters attained *Sotāpanna*, while the younger was a *Sakadāgāmi*. His only son, Kāla, who at

first had no interest in religion, later became a *Sotāpanna* through the skillfulness of his father.

Anāthapiṇḍika breathed his last breath after hearing a profound discourse from Venerable Sāriputta.

As he was about to die, Anāthapiṇḍika sent a messenger to inform the *Buddha* that he was seriously ill and that he paid his homage to Him and then to request Venerable Sāriputta to have compassion on him and to visit him in his house. As invited, Venerable Sāriputta, accompanied by Venerable Ānanda, proceeded to Anāthapiṇḍika's house and asked him about his health. Anāthapiṇḍika replied that he was in acute pain and saw no signs of progress. Venerable Sāriputta then preached a profound discourse. Tears came to Anāthapiṇḍika's eyes at the end of the discourse. Seeing him in tears, Venerable Ānanda asked him whether he was sinking. Anāthapiṇḍika then answered: "Not at all, Venerable Sir. Though I have long attended on the Master and His disciples, never did I hear such a discourse."

"Such discourses are not taught to the white-robed lay followers inasmuch as they cannot comprehend their meaning, but are reserved for advanced disciples," replied Venerable Sāriputta. But Anāthapiṇḍika begged Venerable Sāriputta to expound such intricate *Dhamma* to the laity as well, for there would be some who could understand.

Not long before the departure of these two great disciples, Anāthapiṇḍika passed away and was immediately reborn in Tusita heaven.

Later that night, the *deva* who had been Anāthapiṇḍika, illuminating the whole Jeta Grove, came up to the *Buddha*, saluted Him, and, extolling the virtues of Venerable Sāriputta, expressed his pleasure on seeing the *Buddha* and His disciples residing in the monastery, and said:

*"Oh blessed is this Jeta's Grove, dwelt in by the sagely Sangha, wherein resides the King of Dhamma, the fount of all my happiness.*

*"By action, knowledge, and Dhamma; by virtue and noble way of life — by these are mortals purified, not by lineage or wealth.*

*"Therefore, a wise person who sees what truly leads to his own good should investigate the Dhamma and purify himself with it.*

*"Sāriputta has reached the peak in virtue, peace, and wisdom's ways; any Bhikkhu who has gone beyond at best can only equal him."*

## Visākhā

Visākhā was the devout and generous daughter of the millionaire Dhanañjaya. Her mother was Sumanā Devī, and her beloved grandfather was the millionaire Menḍaka.

When she was only seven years old, the *Buddha* happened to visit her birthplace, Bhaddiya, in the kingdom of Anga. Her grandfather, hearing of the *Buddha*'s visit, said to her: "Dear girl, this is a happy day for you and a happy day for me. Summon the five

hundred maidens who are your attendants, mount five hundred chariots, and, accompanied by your five hundred maidservants, go forth to welcome the *Buddha*.”

She readily agreed and, as advised, went up to the *Buddha*, saluted Him, and sat respectfully at one side. The *Buddha* was pleased with her refined manners, and He preached the *Dhamma* to her and others. Though young in age, she was comparatively far advanced from a moral standpoint. As such, immediately after hearing the *Dhamma*, she attained the first stage of Sainthood (*Sotāpanna*) at her young age.

It is stated that, even in the prime of her youth, she possessed extraordinary poise and was gifted with all womanly charms. Her hair was like a peacock's tail, and, when loosened, it reached the hem of her skirt, and then the ends of the hair curled and turned upwards. Her lips were of a bright red color and were smooth and soft to the touch. Her teeth were white and were evenly set without gaps between them and shown like a row of diamonds. Her skin, without the use of any cosmetics, was as smooth as a blue lotus-wreath and was of a golden color. She retained her youthful appearance although she bore several children.

Endowed with these five kinds of feminine beauty — hair, flesh, bone, skin, and youth —, young Visākhā excelled in worldly wisdom and spiritual insight.

When she was about fifteen or sixteen years old, on a certain festival day, she went on foot with her retinue in a holiday spirit to the river to bathe. Suddenly, there arose an unexpected shower, and all but young Visākhā ungraciously ran as fast as they could and took shelter in a hall where there were some Brahmins who had come in search of a suitable maiden possessed of the five kinds of feminine beauty for their young master. Cultured Visākhā, without any particular haste, graciously proceeded at her usual pace and entered the hall with garments and ornaments soaking wet. The inquisitive Brahmins criticized her for not running as the others had done to escape being drenched by the rain.

Talented Visākhā rose to the occasion and gave an impromptu speech on deportment according to her view. She said that she could have run even faster, but she had purposely refrained from doing so. Then, she explained that it was not becoming for a King, adorned with all his finery, to gird up his loins and run in the palace court. Likewise, it was not becoming for a fully-outfitted state elephant to run — it should move about with the natural grace of an elephant. Monks also incur criticism when they run about like ordinary laymen. In like manner, it is not a dignified spectacle to see a woman running about like a man.

The Brahmins were pleased with her instructive speech and thought that she was an ideal wife for their master. Accordingly, arrangements were made to give her in marriage to their master, Puṇṇavaddhana, himself the son of a millionaire named Migāra, who was not a follower of the *Buddha*.

The marriage festival was conducted on an elaborate scale. On the wedding day, in addition to a large dowry and an exquisitely rich ornament, her father gave her the following advice:



1. Do not carry outside the indoor fire.<sup>194</sup>
2. Do not take inside the outdoor fire.
3. Give only to those who give.
4. Do not give to those who do not give.
5. Give both to those who give and do not give.
6. Sit happily.
7. Eat happily.
8. Sleep happily.
9. Tend the fire.
10. Honor the household divinities.

Their implied meaning is as follows:

1. The wife should not speak ill of her husband and parents-in-law to others. Neither should their shortcomings nor household quarrels be reported elsewhere.
2. A wife should not listen to the reports and stories of other households.
3. Things should be lent to those who return them.
4. Nothing should be lent to those who do not return them.
5. Poor relatives should be helped even if they do not repay.
6. A wife should sit in a becoming way. On seeing her parents-in-law or her husband, she should keep standing and not sit.
7. Before partaking of her meals, a wife should first make sure that her parents-in-law and husband are served. She should also ensure that her servants are well cared for.
8. Before going to bed, a wife should make sure that all doors are closed, furniture is safe, servants have performed their duties, and that parents-in-law have retired. As a rule, a wife should rise early in the morning, and, unless unwell, she should not sleep during the day.
9. Parents-in-law and husband should be regarded as fire. One should deal carefully with them as one would deal with a fire.
10. Parents-in-law and husband should be regarded as divinities. It is noteworthy that the *Buddha* himself refers to parents-in-law as divinities (*sassudevā*).

On the day that she arrived in Sāvattthī, the city where her husband lived, she was showered with various presents sent from people of all ranks, according to their status and ability. But so kind and generous was she that she distributed them among the donors themselves with a kind message and treated all the residents of the city as if they were her own relatives. By this noble gesture on the very first day that she came to her husband's home, she became endeared to all the people of the city.

There is an incident in her life that reveals her dutiful kindness even towards animals. Hearing that her well-bred mare had given birth to a fowl in the middle of the

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<sup>194</sup> Here, "fire" signifies slandering.



night, she went to the stable with her female attendants bearing torches in their hands and attended to all the mare's needs with the greatest care and attention.

Inasmuch as her father-in-law was a staunch follower of Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta,<sup>195</sup> he invited a large number of naked ascetics to his house for alms. On their arrival, Visākhā was requested to come and render homage to these so-called "*Arahants*." She was delighted to hear the word "*Arahant*" and hurried to the hall only to see naked ascetics devoid of all modesty. The sight was too unbearable for a refined lady such as Visākhā. She reproached her father-in-law and retired to her quarters without entertaining them. The naked ascetics took offense and found fault with the millionaire for having brought a female follower of the *Buddha* to his house. They asked him to expel Visākhā from the house immediately.

The millionaire pacified them. One day, he sat on a costly seat and began to eat some sweet rice porridge from a golden bowl. At that moment, a *Bhikkhu* came to the house seeking alms. Visākhā was fanning her father-in-law and, without informing him of the *Bhikkhu*'s presence, moved aside so that he might see the *Bhikkhu*. Although he saw the *Bhikkhu*, he continued eating as if he had not seen him.

Visākhā politely told the *Bhikkhu*: "Pass on, Venerable Sir, my father-in-law is eating stale food."

The ignorant millionaire, misconstruing her words, was so provoked that he ordered the bowl to be removed and Visākhā to be expelled from the house. However, Visākhā was the favorite of everyone in the house, and, so, nobody dared to touch her.

But Visākhā, disciplined as she was, would not accept without protest such treatment even from her father-in-law. She politely said:

*"Father, this is not a sufficient reason why I should leave your house. I was not brought here by you like a slave girl from some ford. Daughters, whose parents are alive, do not leave like this. It is for this very reason that my father, when I set out to come here, summoned eight clansmen and entrusted me to them, saying: 'If there be any fault in my daughter, investigate it.' Send word to them and let them judge my guilt or innocence."*

The millionaire agreed to her proposal and, summoning them, said:

*"At a time of festivity, while I was sitting eating sweet milk-rice porridge from a golden bowl, this girl said that what I was eating was unclean. Convict her of this offense and expel her from this house."*

<sup>195</sup> Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta, also known as Mahāvīra, systematized Jainism. He was a contemporary of the *Buddha*. Jainism is an orthodox Indian religion that rejects the authority of the Vedas. Jains do not believe in God. Their religion teaches that divinity resides in every soul, and perfect souls are venerated as the Supreme Spirit. Liberation is attained through right belief, right knowledge, and right action, whereby the practice of harmlessness towards all living beings is particularly stressed. Cf. *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion* (Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications [1989]), pp. 158—159.

Visākhā proved her innocence, stating:

*“That is not precisely what I said. When a certain Bhikkhu was standing at the door for alms, my father-in-law was eating sweet milk-rice porridge ignoring him. Thinking to myself that my father-in-law, without performing any good deeds in this life, was only consuming the merits of past deeds, I told the Bhikkhu: ‘Pass on, Venerable Sir, my father-in-law is eating stale food’.”*

She was acquitted of the charge, and the father-in-law himself agreed that she was not guilty.

But the spiteful millionaire accused her again for having gone behind the house with male and female attendants in the middle watch of the night. When she explained that she actually did so in order to attend on a mare in labor, the clansmen remarked that their noble daughter had performed an exemplary act, which even a slave-girl would not do. She was thus acquitted of the second charge too.

But the vengeful millionaire would not rest until she was found guilty of some charge. The next time, he found fault with her for no wrong of hers. He said that, before her departure from home, her father gave her ten admonitions. For instance, he said to her: “The indoor fire should not be taken out of doors.” “Is it really possible to live without giving fire even to our neighbors on both sides of us?”, questioned the millionaire. Thereupon, Visākhā took the opportunity to explain all ten admonitions in detail to his entire satisfaction. The millionaire was silenced, and he had no other charges to make.

Having proved her innocence, self-respecting Visākhā now desired to leave the house as she was ordered to do at first.

The millionaire’s attitude toward Visākhā was completely changed, and he was compelled to seek her forgiveness for the charges he had made against her. Forbearing Visākhā, in accordance with her true Buddhist spirit, granted him pardon on condition that he would give her complete freedom to carry on her religious activities as she desired. Her father-in-law readily agreed to this and granted her full freedom to perform her religious activities.

Now, Visākhā lost no time in inviting the *Buddha* to the house for alms. The *Buddha* came and had His meal. After the meal was over, the *Buddha* delivered a discourse. The millionaire was sitting behind a curtain and heard the discourse. At the end of the discourse, he became a *Sotāpanna*. Thereupon, he acknowledged his boundless gratitude to his daughter-in-law for having initiated him into the True Path of Deliverance and emotionally proclaimed that he would henceforth regard Visākhā as his mother.

Later on, when she bore a son, Visākhā named him Migāra.

On the following day, the *Buddha* visited her house, and, on that occasion, her mother-in-law heard the *Dhamma* and became a *Sotāpanna*.

By her tact, wisdom, and patience, she gradually succeeded in converting her husband’s household to a happy Buddhist home.

Daily, Visākhā would give alms to the *Sangha* at her own house. Both in the forenoon and afternoon, she would visit the monastery to minister to the needs of the *Sangha* and hear discourses from the *Buddha*. Suppiyā, another devout Buddhist lady, usually accompanied her during her visit.

Visākhā was so generous that she once approached the *Buddha* and asked for the following eight boons:

1. To give robes to the *Sangha* during the rainy season for as long as she lived;
2. To provide alms to the *Bhikkhus* coming to Sāvattihī;
3. To provide alms to those going out of Sāvattihī;
4. To give food to sick *Bhikkhus*;
5. To give food to those who attend on the sick;
6. To give medicine for the sick *Bhikkhus*;
7. To give rice-gruel for *Bhikkhus*;
8. To give bathing garments for nuns.

One day, Visākhā happened to visit the monastery wearing her best garment, which had been given to her by her father as a wedding present. But, inasmuch as she thought it was unseemly to appear before the *Buddha* so gaily dressed, she removed it, folded it into a bundle, gave it to her maidservant, and went to see the *Buddha* dressed in another garment given to her by her father-in-law. After the discourse, Visākhā left the monastery accompanied by the maidservant, who forgot to take the bundle that had been placed in her custody. Venerable Ānanda saw the bundle and, as instructed by the *Buddha*, put it in a safe place, later to be returned to its owner. On hearing that the bundle had inadvertently been left behind by the maidservant, Visākhā asked her to bring it back, provided that it had not been touched by Venerable Ānanda. When what had happened was reported to Visākhā, she went to the *Buddha* and expressed her desire to do something beneficial with the money realized by selling the garment. The *Buddha* advised her to erect a monastery at the East Gate for the use of the *Sangha*. However, inasmuch as no one had the means to buy the costly garment, Visākhā herself bought it back and erected a monastery at a great cost and named it Pubbārāma. As invited by Visākhā, the *Buddha* and His disciples spent the *vassāna* period<sup>196</sup> in this new, spacious monastery. Great was Visākhā's joy when the *Buddha* spent six rainy seasons there.

It is stated that Visākhā, instead of chastising the maidservant for her apparent negligence, expressed gratitude, because the maidservant had given her the opportunity to perform this good deed.

On various occasions, several discourses were delivered to Visākhā by the *Buddha*. In one discourse, the *Buddha* spoke on the observance of the Eight Precepts by

<sup>196</sup> *Vassāna* "the rainy season." In ancient times, as well as today, three regular seasons were recognized in India: (1) *vassāna* (the rainy season); (2) *hemanta* (the winter season); and (3) *gimhāna* (the hot season). The *vassāna*, or rainy season, begins in the month of *Āsālha* and extends up to the month of *Assayuga*, that is, approximately from the middle of July to the middle of November.

laymen on *Uposatha* Days,<sup>197</sup> the observance of which prevails in almost all Buddhist countries in Asia up to this day.

Dealing with the qualities that make a woman seek birth in happy states, the *Buddha* said:<sup>198</sup>

*“Active, careful to cherish him always,  
She does not neglect the man who brings her every joy;  
Nor will a good wife move her husband to anger by some spiteful words;  
And she reveres all whom her lord honors,  
For she is wise. Deft, nimble, early to rise,  
She minds his wealth among friends and coworkers  
And sweetly keeps all in order. A wife like this,  
Who complies with her husband’s wish and will,  
Is born again where lovely devas dwell.”*

In another discourse, the *Buddha*, referring to the qualities in a woman that tend to well-being and happiness in this world and in the next, spoke as follows:<sup>199</sup>

*“Herein, Visākhā, a woman is capable at her work, she manages the servants, in her ways, she is lovely to her husband, and she manages his wealth.  
“Herein, Visākhā, a woman is accomplished in trustful confidence, virtue, charity, and wisdom.”*

Being a lady of many talents, Visākhā played an important role in various activities connected with the *sāsana*.<sup>200</sup> At times, she was authorized by the *Buddha* to settle disputes that arose among the *Bhikkhunis*. Some *Vinaya* rules were also laid down for *Bhikkhus* owing to her intervention.

Due to her magnanimity, she was regarded as the chief benefactress of the *sāsana* and the greatest female supporter of the *Buddha*.

By her dignified conduct, graceful deportment, refined manners, courteous speech, obedience and reverence to elders, compassion to those who were less fortunate, kind hospitality, and religious zeal, she won the hearts of all those who knew her.

<sup>197</sup> Usually, the 1st, 8th, 15th, and 23rd of the lunar month are regarded as the *Uposatha* or Holy Days, when lay followers observe the following Eight Precepts (*aṭṭhanga-samannāgata uposatha*): (1) to abstain from taking life; (2) to abstain from taking what is not freely given; (3) to abstain from all sexual activity; (4) to abstain from false speech; (5) to abstain from intoxicating drinks and drugs causing heedlessness; (6) to abstain from eating solid food after noon; (7) to abstain from dancing, singing, music, and unseemly shows; from the use of garlands, perfumes, and unguents; and from things that tend to beautify and adorn; and (8) to abstain from using high and luxurious beds and seats. Though, as a rule, the Eight Precepts are traditionally observed on the *Uposatha* Days, there is no objection to observing them on any convenient day, the object being to control deeds, words, and the five senses.

<sup>198</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya*, Part IV.

<sup>199</sup> *Anguttara Nikāya*, Part IV.

<sup>200</sup> *Sāsana*, literally, “message,” that is, the Buddhist religion, teachings, doctrines.

It is stated that she had the good fortune to be the happy mother of ten fortunate sons and ten fortunate daughters. She died at the ripe old age of one hundred twenty.

### **Jīvaka, the Fosterling**

Jīvaka was the celebrated physician of the *Buddha*.

Immediately after his birth, Jīvaka was placed in a casket and was cast away by his mother, a courtesan, on a dust heap by the side of the road.

Prince Abhaya, a son of King Bimbisāra, happened to pass that way and saw the helpless infant surrounded by crows. Discovering that he was alive (*jīvati*), Prince Abhaya took him with him and placed him in the care of nurses.

Inasmuch as he was found alive, he was named Jīvaka. Since he was adopted by a Prince, he was called Komārabhacca.

Growing up, he became a skillful physician and surgeon. It is stated that he performed two successful operations on a millionaire who was suffering from a severe headache.

He used to attend on the *Buddha* three times a day.

When the *Buddha's* foot was wounded by a splinter caused by the hurling of a rock by Devadatta, it was Jīvaka who attended on Him and healed Him.

Realizing the manifold advantages of having a monastery close to his residence, Jīvaka erected one in his mango park. After the consecration ceremony of this monastery, he became a Stream-Winner (*Sotāpanna*).

The Jīvaka Sutta,<sup>201</sup> which deals with the question of eating flesh, was delivered by the *Buddha* to Jīvaka.

It was Jīvaka who induced King Ajātasattu to visit the *Buddha* after he had killed his father, King Bimbisāra.

At his request, the *Buddha* directed His disciples to undertake regular physical exercise. ■

### **Further Reading**

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Nyanaponika Thera and Hellmuth Hecker. 1997. *Great Disciples of the Buddha: Their Lives, Their Works, Their Legacy*. Edited with an Introduction by Bhikkhu Bodhi. Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications.

<sup>201</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, Gahapativagga, Jīvaka Sutta, no. 55.



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## The Buddha's Royal Patrons

*"A treacherous bog it is, this patronage of bows and gifts and treats from the wealthy. It is like a fine dart embedded in the flesh, for erring humans hard to extricate."*<sup>202</sup>

### King Bimbisāra

King Bimbisāra, who ruled in Magadha, with its capital at Rājagaha, was the *Buddha's* first royal patron. Ascending the throne at the age of fifteen, he reigned for fifty-two years.

When Prince Siddhattha renounced the world and was seeking alms in the street of Rājagaha as a humble ascetic, the King saw Him from the palace and was highly impressed by His majestic appearance and dignified deportment. Immediately, he sent messengers to ascertain who He was. On learning that He was resting after His meal under the *pandavapabbata*, the King, accompanied by his retinue, went up to the royal ascetic and inquired about His birthplace and ancestry. The Ascetic Gotama replied:

*"Just straight, O King, upon the Himalayas, there is, in the district of Kosala of ancient families, a country endowed with wealth and energy. I am sprung from that family, which, by clan, belongs to the Solar dynasty, by birth to the Sākyas. I crave not for pleasures of the senses. Realizing the evil of sensory pleasures and seeing renunciation as safe, I proceed to seek the Highest, for, in that, my mind rejoices."*<sup>203</sup>

Thereupon, the King invited Him to visit his kingdom after His Enlightenment.

### The Buddha Meets King Bimbisāra

In accordance with the promise that the *Buddha* made to King Bimbisāra before His Enlightenment, He, with His large troupe of *Arahant* disciples, went from Gayā to

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<sup>202</sup> *Khuddaka Nikāya*, Pārāyaṇavagga, Mahākassapa Theragāthā (1053).

<sup>203</sup> *Sutta Nipāta*, Pabbajjā Sutta.



Rājagaha, the capital of the district of Magadha. Here, He stayed at the Suppatittha Shrine in a Palm Grove.

The happy news of the *Buddha's* arrival in the kingdom and His high reputation as an unparalleled religious teacher soon spread throughout the city. The King, hearing of His arrival, came with a large number of his subjects to welcome the *Buddha*. He approached the *Buddha*, respectfully saluted Him, and sat at one side. Thereupon, some of the King's subjects respectfully saluted the *Buddha*, some looked at Him with expressions of friendly greetings, some saluted Him with clasped hands, some introduced themselves, while others silently took their seats. Since both the *Buddha* and Venerable Kassapa were held in high esteem by the multitude, they were not certain whether the *Buddha* was leading the Holy Life under Venerable Kassapa or whether Venerable Kassapa was leading the Holy Life under the *Buddha*. The *Buddha* read their thoughts and questioned Venerable Kassapa as to why he had given up his fire-sacrifice. Understanding the motive of the *Buddha's* question, he explained that he had abandoned the fire-sacrifice because he preferred the passionless and peaceful state of *nibbāna* to worthless sensory pleasures. After this, he fell at the feet of the *Buddha* and, acknowledging His superiority, repeated: "My Teacher, Lord, is the Exalted One — I am the disciple. My Teacher, Lord, is the Exalted One — I am the disciple."

The devout people were delighted to hear of the conversion of Venerable Kassapa. Thereupon, the *Buddha* preached the *Mahā Nārada Kassapa Jātaka*<sup>204</sup> to show that, in a previous birth, when He was born as Nārada, He had converted Kassapa in a similar way.

Hearing the *Dhamma* expounded by the *Buddha*, the "Eye of Truth" arose in them all. King Bimbisāra attained *Sotāpanna*, and, seeking refuge in the *Buddha*, the *Dhamma*, and the *Sangha*, invited the *Buddha* and His disciples to the palace for the meal on the following day. After the meal, the King wished to know where the *Buddha* would reside. The *Buddha* replied that a secluded place, neither too far nor too close to the city, accessible to those who desired to visit Him, pleasant, not crowded during the day, not too noisy at night, with as few sounds as possible, and fit for the privacy of men, would be suitable.

The King thought that his Bamboo Grove would meet all such requirements. Therefore, in return for the transcendental gift that the *Buddha* had bestowed upon him, he gave the park with its ideally secluded bamboo grove<sup>205</sup> for the use of the *Buddha* and the *Sangha*. This park had no buildings to shelter the *Sangha* but was filled with many shady trees and secluded spots. This was the first gift of a place of residence for the *Buddha* and His disciples. The *Buddha* spent three successive rainy seasons and three other rainy seasons in this quiet Bamboo Grove (*veḷuvanārāma*).<sup>206</sup>

After his conversion, the King led the life of an exemplary monarch, observing *Uposatha* regularly on four days of the month.

<sup>204</sup> *Khuddaka Nikāya*, Pārāyaṇavagga, *Jātaka*, no. 544.

<sup>205</sup> Also known as the "Sanctuary of the Squirrels."

<sup>206</sup> In Pāḷi, *Ārāma* means a mere park. There were no buildings when the *Buddha* accepted this generous gift. At present, the term *Ārāma* is used in the sense of a monastery with buildings for monks.

Kosala Devī, daughter of King Mahā Kosala and sister of King Pasenadi of Kosala, was King Bimbisāra's loyal queen. Prince Ajātasattu was their son. Khemā, who, through the ingenuity of the King, became a follower of the *Buddha* and who later rose to the position of the first female disciple of the Order of Nuns, was another queen.

Though he was a pious monarch, yet, due to his past evil *kamma*, he had a very sad and pathetic end. Prince Ajātasattu, successor to the throne, instigated by wicked Devadatta Thera, attempted to kill his father and usurp the throne. The unfortunate prince was caught red-handed, but the compassionate father, instead of punishing him for his brutal act, rewarded him with the coveted crown.

The ungrateful son showed his gratitude to his father by casting him into prison in order to starve him to death. His mother alone had free access to the King daily. The loyal queen carried food concealed in her waist-pouch. The prince found out and ordered her to stop. She then carried food concealed in her hair-knot. Again, the prince found out. Thereupon, she bathed herself in scented water and smeared her body with a mixture of honey, butter, ghee, and molasses. The King licked her body and sustained himself. The over-vigilant prince detected this as well and ordered his mother not to visit his father.

King Bimbisāra was without any means of sustenance, but he paced back and forth enjoying spiritual happiness, since he was a *Sotāpanna*. Ultimately, his wicked son decided to put an end to the life of his noble father. Ruthlessly, he ordered King Bimbisāra's barber to cut open the soles of his feet, put salt and oil on the open cuts, and then roast the King's feet with burning charcoal.

The King, who saw the barber approaching, thought that his son, realizing his folly, was sending the barber to shave his beard and cut his hair in preparation for his release from prison. Contrary to his expectations, he met a sad end. The barber ruthlessly executed the barbarous orders of Ajātasattu. The good King died in great agony. On that very day, a son was born to Ajātasattu. Letters conveying the news of the birth of his son and the death of his father reached the palace at the same time.

The letter conveying the happy news was read first. The love that arose in Ajātasattu towards his first-born son was indescribable. He was thrilled with joy, and his paternal love penetrated to the core of his body.

Immediately, he rushed to his mother and questioned her: "Mother dear, did my father love me when I was a child?"

"What are you saying, son? When you were conceived in my womb, I developed a craving to sip some blood from the right hand of your father. This, I dare not say. Consequently, I grew pale and thin. I was finally persuaded to disclose my inhuman desire. Joyfully, your father fulfilled my wish, and I drank that abhorrent potion. The soothsayers predicted that you would be an enemy of your father. Accordingly, you were named Ajātasattu (Unborn Enemy). I attempted to induce a miscarriage, but your father prevented it. After you were born, again, I wanted to kill you. But, again, your father interfered. On one occasion, you were suffering from a boil on your finger, and nobody was able to lull you to sleep. But your father, who was administering justice in the royal court, took you into his lap and, caressing you, sucked the boil. Thereupon, it burst open

in his mouth. O, my dear son, that pus and blood! Yet, your affectionate father swallowed it out of love for you.”

Instantly, Ajātasattu cried: “Run and release my beloved father quickly!” But his father had closed his eyes forever. The other letter was then placed in his hand, and Ajātasattu burst into tears. He realized what paternal love was only after he became a father himself.

After King Bimbisāra died, he was immediately reborn as a *deva* named Janavasabha in the Cātummahārājika Heaven.

Later, Ajātasattu was completely transformed and became one of the *Buddha*’s distinguished lay followers. After the *Buddha*’s *parinibbāna*, Ajātasattu took a leading part in the holding of the First Council.<sup>207</sup>

### King Pasenadi of Kosala

King Pasenadi, son of Mahā Kosala, who reigned in the kingdom of Kosala, with its capital at Sāvattthī, was another royal patron of the *Buddha*. He was a contemporary of the *Buddha* and, owing to his proficiency in various arts, had the good fortune to be made King by his father while he was still alive.

His conversion must probably have taken place during the very early part of the *Buddha*’s ministry. In the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, it is stated that he once approached the *Buddha* and, questioning Him about His perfect Enlightenment, referred to Him as being young in years and young in ordination.<sup>208</sup> The *Buddha* replied:

“There are four objects, O Mahārāja, that should not be disregarded or despised. They are a *Khattiya*,<sup>209</sup> a snake, fire, and a *Bhikkhu*.”<sup>210</sup>

<sup>207</sup> The First Council was held at Rājagaha during the first rainy season retreat three months after the *parinibbāna* of the *Buddha*. Its goal was to preserve the purity of the *Dhamma*. Five hundred *Arahants* attended, led by Mahā Kassapa. First, Venerable Upāli was questioned on the *Vinaya*, and then Venerable Ānanda was questioned on the *Dhamma*. Their responses were collected and standardized into the *Vinaya Piṭaka* and *Sutta Piṭaka* respectively. A Second Council was held 100 years later, and a Third Council 236 years later.

The most recent Buddhist council, the Sixth Council, was held in Burma (Myanmar) from 17 May 1954 to 24 May 1956. The completion date of the Council coincided with the 2,500th anniversary of the *parinibbāna* of the *Buddha*. The Council was convened eighty-three years after the Fifth Council, which was held in Mandalay, Burma, in 1871. As in previous Buddhist councils, the major purpose of the Sixth Council was to preserve the *Buddha*’s teachings and practices as understood in the Theravādin tradition. Over the two-year period during which the council took place, monks from different countries recited from their existing versions of the Pāli Canon and the associated post-canonical literature. As a result, the Council synthesized a new redaction of the Pāli texts, ultimately transcribed into several native scripts.

<sup>208</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 1:64.

<sup>209</sup> Sanskrit *Kṣatriya*. A member of the Warrior Caste.

<sup>210</sup> An enraged warrior prince, though young, may ruthlessly cause harm to others. The bite of even a small snake may prove fatal. A little spark may produce a huge fire. Even a young *Bhikkhu* may be a Saint or a *Dhamma* scholar.

The *Buddha* then delivered an interesting discourse on the subject to the King. At the close of the discourse, the King expressed his great pleasure and instantly became a follower of the *Buddha*. From that moment until his death, he was deeply devoted to the *Buddha*. It is said that, on one occasion, the King prostrated himself before the *Buddha* and stroked His feet, covering them with kisses.<sup>211</sup>

His chief queen, Mallikā, a very devout and wise lady, well versed in the *Dhamma*, was greatly responsible for his religious enthusiasm. Like a true friend, she had to act as his religious guide on several occasions.

One day, the King dreamt sixteen unusual dreams and was greatly perturbed in mind, not knowing their true significance. His Brahmin advisers interpreted them to be dreams portending evil and instructed him to make an elaborate animal sacrifice to ward off the dangers that would result therefrom. As advised, he made all the necessary arrangements for the inhuman sacrifice, which would have resulted in the slaying of thousands of helpless creatures. Queen Mallikā, hearing that this barbarous act was about to be perpetrated, persuaded the King to have his dreams interpreted by the *Buddha*, whose understanding infinitely surpassed that of those worldly Brahmins. The King approached the *Buddha* and mentioned the purpose of his visit. Relating the sixteen dreams, he wished to know their significance. Thereupon, the *Buddha* fully explained their significance to him. Satisfied, the King abandoned the plans for the animal sacrifice.

Unlike King Bimbisāra, King Pasenadi had the good fortune to hear several edifying and instructive discourses from the *Buddha*. In the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, there is a special section called the Kosala Saṃyutta,<sup>212</sup> in which most of the discourses given to the King by the *Buddha* are recorded.

Once, while the King was seated in the company of the *Buddha*, he saw some ascetics with hairy bodies and long nails passing by and, rising from his seat, respectfully saluted them, calling out his name to them: "I am the King, your reverences, the Kosala, Pasenadi." When they had gone, he came back to the *Buddha* and wished to know whether they were *Arahants* or those who were striving for Arahantship. The *Buddha* explained that it was difficult for ordinary laymen enjoying material pleasures to judge whether others are *Arahants* or not and made the following interesting observations:

*"It is by association that one's conduct is to be understood, and that, too, after a long time and not in a short time, by one who is watchful and not by a heedless person, by an intelligent person and not by an unintelligent one. It is by talking with him that one's purity is to be understood. It is in time of trouble that one's fortitude is to be understood. It is by discussion that one's wisdom is to be understood, and that, too, after a long time and not in a short time, by one who is watchful and not by a heedless person, by an intelligent person and not by an unintelligent one."*

<sup>211</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, Rājavagga, Dhammacetiya Sutta, no. 89.

<sup>212</sup> *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, Sagāthavagga, Kosala Saṃyutta, no. 3.

King Pasenadi, as ruler of a great kingdom, could not possibly have avoided warfare, especially with kings of neighboring countries. Once, he was compelled to fight against his own nephew, King Ajātasattu of Magadha, and was defeated. Hearing about it, the *Buddha* remarked:

*“Conquest breeds hatred, for the conquered live in sorrow. Those who are peaceful live happily, having renounced both conquest and defeat.”*<sup>213</sup>

On another occasion, King Pasenadi was victorious, and he confiscated the whole army of King Ajātasattu, sparing only him. When the *Buddha* heard about the new victory, He uttered the following verse, the truth of which applies with equal force to this modern war-weary world as well:

*“A man may spoil another just so far as it may serve his ends, but, when he is spoiled by others, he, despoiled, spoils yet again. So long as the fruit of evil has not matured, the fool fancies ‘now is the hour, [now is] the chance!’ But, when the deed bears fruit, evil befalls him. The slayer gets a slayer in his turn. The conqueror gets one who conquers him. The abuser gains abuse. The annoyer is himself annoyed. Thus, by the evolution of the deed, a man who spoils is spoiled in his turn.”*

What the *Buddha* said to King Pasenadi about women is equally interesting and encouraging to women. Once, while the King was engaged in a pious conversation with the *Buddha*, a messenger came and whispered into his ear that Queen Mallikā had given birth to a daughter. The King was not pleased at this unwelcome news. In ancient India, as it is to a great extent today, a daughter is not considered a happy addition to a family for several selfish reasons such as, for instance, the problem of providing a dowry. The *Buddha*, unlike any other religious teacher, paid a glowing tribute to women and mentioned four chief characteristics that adorn a woman in the following words:

*“Some women are, indeed, better [than men]. Bring her up, O Lord of men.*

*“There are women who are wise and virtuous, who regard their mother-in-law as a goddess, and who are chaste.*

*“A valiant son, a lord of realms, who would rule a kingdom, may be born to such a noble wife.”*

“Some women are indeed better [than men]” — *itthi hi pi ekacchiyā seyyā* were the actual words used by the *Buddha*. No religious teacher has made such a bold and noble pronouncement, especially in India, where women were not held in high esteem.

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<sup>213</sup> *Dhammapada*, XV, Happiness, verse 201.

Deeply grieved over the death of his old grandmother at the age of one hundred twenty, King Pasenadi approached the *Buddha* and said that he would have given everything within his means to save his grandmother, who had been a mother to him. The *Buddha* consoled him, saying:

*“All beings are mortal — they end with death, they have death as their prospect. All the vessels wrought by the potter, whether they are baked or unbaked, are breakable — they finish broken, they have breakage as their prospect.”*

The King so greatly desired to hear the *Dhamma* that, even if affairs of state demanded his presence in other parts of the kingdom, he would avail himself of every possible opportunity to visit the *Buddha* and engage in pious conversation. The Dhammacetiya<sup>214</sup> and Kaṇṇakatthala<sup>215</sup> Suttas were delivered on such occasions.

King Pasenadi's chief consort, the daughter of a garland-maker, predeceased him. One of his wives was a sister of King Bimbisāra. One of his sisters was married to King Bimbisāra, and Ajātasattu was her son.

King Pasenadi had a son named Viḍūḍabha, who revolted against him in his old age. The son's mother was the daughter of Mahānāma the Sākya, who was related to the *Buddha*, and his grandmother was a slave-girl. The King did not know this fact when he took her as one of his consorts. Hearing a derogatory remark made by Sākyans about his ignoble ancestry, Viḍūḍabha took vengeance by attempting to destroy the Sākya people. Unfortunately, it was due to Viḍūḍabha that the King had to die a pathetic death in a hall outside the city, with only a servant as his companion. King Pasenadi predeceased the *Buddha*. ■

<sup>214</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, Rājavagga, Dhammacetiya Sutta, no. 89.

<sup>215</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, Rājavagga, Kaṇṇakatthala Sutta, no. 90.





# 11

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## The Buddha's Ministry

*“Avoid all evil, cultivate the good, purify your mind: this sums up the teaching of the Buddhas.”*<sup>216</sup>

### Introduction

The *Buddha's* beneficent and successful ministry lasted forty-five years. From His 35th year, the year of His Enlightenment, until His death in His 80th year, He served humanity both by example and precept. Throughout the year, He wandered from place to place, at times alone, sometimes accompanied by His disciples, expounding the *Dhamma* to the people and liberating them from the bonds of *samsāra*. During the rainy season (*vassāna*), which lasted from July to November, owing to incessant rains, He lived in retreat, as was customary with all ascetics in India at the time.

In olden times, as today, three regular seasons prevailed in India, namely, *vassāna* (the rainy or monsoon season), *hemanta* (the cold season, winter), and *gimhāna* (the hot season). The rainy season (*vassāna*) starts in the month of *Āsālha* and extends up to the month of *Assayuga*, that is, approximately from the middle of July to the middle of November.

During the rainy season, due to torrential rains, rivers and streams usually get flooded, roads get inundated, communications get interrupted, and people, as a rule, are confined to their homes and villages and live on whatever provisions they have collected during the previous seasons. During this period, the ascetics find it difficult to wander from place to place engaging in their preaching tours. An infinite variety of vegetable and animal life also appears to such an extent that people could not move about without unconsciously destroying them. Accordingly, all ascetics, including the *Buddha* and His disciples, would suspend their itinerant activities and live in retreat in solitary places. Usually, the *Buddha* and His disciples were invited to spend the rainy seasons either in a monastery or in a secluded park. Sometimes, however, they spent their retreats in forests. During these retreats, whether in a monastery, secluded park, or forest, people flocked to the *Buddha* to listen to the *Dhamma* and thus put the opportunity of His presence in their vicinity to their best advantage.

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<sup>216</sup> *Dhammapada*, XIV, The Buddha, verse 183.

## The First Twenty Years

### *1st Year at Benares (Vārāṇasi; Kāsi)*

After expounding the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta to His first five disciples (Kondaṇṇa, Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahānāma, and Assaji) on the *Āsālha* full moon day, the *Buddha* spent the first rainy season in the Deer Park at Isipatana, near Benares. Here, there was no special building in which He could reside. The conversion of Yasa and his friends took place during this retreat.

### *2nd, 3rd, and 4th Years at Rājagaha*

Rājagaha was the capital of the Kingdom of Magadha, where King Bimbisāra ruled. When the *Buddha* visited the King, in accordance with the promise made by Him before His Enlightenment, the King offered his Bamboo Grove (*veḷuvana*) to the *Buddha* and His disciples. This was an ideal solitary place for monks, inasmuch as it was neither too far from nor too near to the city. The *Buddha* spent three rainy seasons in this quiet grove.

### *5th Year at Vesālī*

During this year, while He was residing in the Pinnacled Hall at Mahāvana, near Vesālī, the *Buddha* heard of the impending death of His father, King Suddhodana, and, hastening to the King's chamber, preached the *Dhamma* to him. The King immediately attained Arahantship. Thereafter, the King experienced the bliss of emancipation and then passed away.

It was in this year that the Order of *Bhikkhunīs* was established at the request of Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī. After the cremation of King Suddhodana, when the *Buddha* was residing in the Nigrodha Park at Kapilavatthu, Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī approached Him and begged permission for women to enter the Order. But the *Buddha* refused and returned to the Pinnacled Hall at Rājagaha. Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī was so intent on renouncing the world that she, accompanied by many Sākyan and Koliyan ladies, walked all the way from Kapilavatthu to Rājagaha and, through the intervention of Venerable Ānanda, succeeded in entering the Order.

### *6th Year at Mankula Hill in Kosambī near Allahabad*

Just as He had performed the “Twin Wonder” (*yamaka pāṭihāriya*) to overcome the pride of His relatives at Kapilavatthu, even so did the *Buddha* perform it for a second time at Mankula Hill in Kosambī<sup>217</sup> to convert His alien followers.

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<sup>217</sup> Kosambī was the capital of the small Kingdom of Vamśa, which was located between the Ganges and Jumna Rivers. It was ruled by King Udena.

### 7th Year at Tāvātimsa Heaven

A few days after the birth of Prince Siddhattha, Queen Mahā Māyā died and was born as a *deva*<sup>218</sup> in the Tusita Heaven. In the seventh year of His ministry, during the rainy season retreat, the *Buddha* is said to have preached the *Abhidhamma*<sup>219</sup> to the *devas* of the Tāvātimsa Heaven, where the *deva* who had been His mother went to hear Him. Daily, He came back to earth and gave a summary of His sermon to Venerable Sāriputta, who, in turn, expounded the doctrine to His disciples. What is embodied in the present *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* is supposed to be this exposition by Sāriputta.

It is stated that, on hearing these discourses, the *deva* who had been His mother attained the first stage of Sainthood (*Sotāpanna*).

### 8th Year

The *Buddha* spent the 8th year of His ministry at Bhesakalā Forest, near Sumsumāra Rock, in the Bhagga District.

### 9th Year at Kosambī

It was in this year that Māgandiyā harbored a grudge against the *Buddha* and sought an opportunity to discredit Him.

Māgandiyā was a beautiful young woman. Her parents would not give her in marriage, since the prospective suitors were not, in their opinion, worthy of their daughter. One day, as the *Buddha* was surveying the world, He perceived the high degree of spiritual development of the parents. Out of compassion for them, He visited the place where Māgandiyā's father was tending the sacred fire. The Brahmin, fascinated by His physical beauty, thought that the *Buddha* was the best person to whom he could give his daughter in marriage and, requesting Him to stay there until his return, hurried home to fetch his daughter. In the meantime, the *Buddha* stamped His footprint on that spot and moved to a different place. The Brahmin and his wife, accompanied by their daughter, who was dressed in her best garments, came to that spot and observed the

<sup>218</sup> *Deva*, literally, “radiant one,” may be translated as “god,” “deity,” or “celestial being.” *Devas* are beings who live in happy realms and who, as a rule, are invisible to the human eye. They are subject, however, just like all human and other beings, to ever-repeated rebirth, old age, and death, and are thus not freed from the cycle of existence (*saṃsāra*) and from misery. There are many classes of celestial beings. Cf. Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines* (4th revised edition; Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society [1980]), p. 54.

<sup>219</sup> The *Abhidhamma*, or “Higher Doctrine,” is the third major division of the Pāli Canon. It consists of seven books, which are systematic expositions of the doctrine from a strict philosophical point of view. They deal especially with the psychological analysis of phenomenal existence. Cf. Russell Webb, *An Analysis of the Pāli Canon*, pp. 39–42 (2nd edition. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society [1991]); Nyanaponika Thera, *Abhidhamma Studies* (Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications [fourth edition 1998]); Bhikkhu Bodhi (ed.), *Abhidhammattha Sangaha: Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma. Pāli Text, Translation, and Explanatory Guide* (Seattle, WA: BPS Pariyatti Editions [2000]).

footprint. The wife, who was knowledgeable about signs, said that it was not the footprint of an ordinary man but of a pure person who had eradicated all passions. The Brahmin ridiculed the idea and, noticing the *Buddha* at a distance, offered his daughter to Him. Thereupon, the *Buddha*, describing how He had overcome His passions, said:

*“Having seen Taṇhā, Aratī, and Rāgā,<sup>220</sup> I had no desire for the pleasures of love. What is this body, filled with urine and dung? I would not be willing to touch it, even with my foot.”*

Hearing His *Dhamma*, the Brahmin and his wife attained *Anāgāmī*, the third stage of Sainthood. But proud Māgandiyā felt insulted and thought to herself:

*“If this man has no need of me, it is perfectly proper for him to say so, but he declares me to be full of urine and dung. Very well, by virtue of birth, lineage, social position, wealth, and the charm of youth that I possess, I shall obtain a husband who is my equal, and then I shall know what ought to be done to the Monk Gotama.”*

Enraged by the words of the *Buddha*, Māgandiyā became filled with hatred. Later, she was given as a consort to King Udena of Vamsa.<sup>221</sup> Taking advantage of her position as one of the royal consorts, she bribed people and instigated them to revile the *Buddha* and drive Him out of the city. When the *Buddha* entered the city, they shouted insults at Him, saying: “You are a thief, a simpleton, a fool, a camel, an ox, an ass, a denizen of hell, a beast. You have no hope of salvation. A state of punishment is all that you can look forward to.”

Venerable Ānanda, unable to bear this filthy abuse, approached the *Buddha* and said:

*“Lord, these citizens are reviling and abusing us. Let us go elsewhere.”*

*“Where shall we go, Ānanda?,” asked the Buddha.*

*“To some other city, Lord,” said Ānanda.*

*“If men revile us there, where shall we go then?,” inquired the Buddha.*

*“To still another city Lord,” said Ānanda.*

*“Ānanda, one should not speak this way. Where a difficulty arises, it should be settled right there. Only under those circumstances is it permissible to go elsewhere.<sup>222</sup> But who are reviling you, Ānanda?,” questioned the Buddha.*

*“Lord, everyone is reviling us, even the slaves,” replied Ānanda.*

<sup>220</sup> The three daughters of Māra.

<sup>221</sup> The King was living at Kosambī at the time. He had two chief consorts: Māgandiyā and Vāsuladattā. Righteous Sāmāvatī, the adopted daughter of his finance minister, Ghosaka, was his queen.

<sup>222</sup> That is to say, only after the difficulty has been resolved.

Admonishing Ānanda to practice patience, the *Buddha* said:

*“Patiently, I shall bear harsh words directed at me, as an elephant bears arrows shot from a bow on the battlefield. Alas, most people are undisciplined.”*<sup>223</sup>

*“Only the trained [horses and elephants] are taken to gatherings of people; the king mounts only the trained [horse or elephant]. Best among men are those who have trained the mind to endure harsh words patiently.*

*“Mules, thoroughbred horses, horses from Sindh, and great elephants are good animals when they are trained. But even better are those with well-trained minds.”*<sup>224</sup>

Again, He addressed Venerable Ānanda and said:

*“Do not be disturbed. These men will revile you only for seven days, and, on the eighth day, they will become silent. A difficulty encountered by the Buddhas lasts no longer than seven days.”*

As predicted, the abuse stopped.

#### *10th Year at Pārileyyaka Forest*

While the *Buddha* was residing at Kosambī, a dispute arose among two *Bhikkhus* — one versed in the *Dhamma* and the other in the *Vinaya* — with respect to the transgression of a minor rule of etiquette in the lavatory. Their respective supporters were also divided into two camps. Even the *Buddha* could not settle the differences between these quarrelsome monks. They were adamant and would not listen to His advice. The *Buddha* thought: “Under the present conditions, the quarrelsome *Bhikkhus* among whom I live make my life one of discomfort. It would be better to retire from the company of men and live a life of solitude.” In pursuance of this thought, without even informing the *Sangha*, alone, He retired to the Pārileyyaka Forest and spent the rainy season at the foot of a beautiful *sāla* tree.

According to the story, it was on this occasion that an elephant and a monkey attended to His needs.<sup>225</sup>

#### *11th Year at Ekanālā, Brahmin Village*

The following Kasībhāradvajā Sutta<sup>226</sup> was delivered here:

<sup>223</sup> The majority of people, being undisciplined in morality, speak without thinking about what they are saying and thus create conflict.

<sup>224</sup> *Dhammapada*, XXIII, The Elephant, verses 320—322.

<sup>225</sup> *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā*, Kosambaka Vatthu.

<sup>226</sup> *Sutta Nipāta*, Uragavagga, Kasībhāradvajā Sutta (The Farmer Bhāradvajā), no. 4

*On one occasion, the Buddha was residing at Ekanālā in Dakkhiṇāgiri, the Brahmin village in Magadha. At that time, about five hundred plows belonging to the Brahmin Kasībhāradvajā<sup>227</sup> were harnessed for plowing. Thereupon, the Exalted One, in the forenoon, dressed Himself and, taking bowl and robe, went to where the Brahmin was working. It was meal time, and the food was being distributed by the Brahmin. The Buddha went to the place where food was being distributed and stood at one side. The Brahmin Kasībhāradvajā saw the Buddha waiting for alms. Seeing Him, he spoke thus: “I, O Ascetic, plow and sow, and, having plowed and sown, I eat. You also, O Ascetic, should plow and sow, and, having plowed and sown, you should eat.”*

*“I, too, O Brahmin, plow and sow, and, having plowed and sown, I eat.”*

*“But we do not see Venerable Gotama’s yoke, or plow, or plowshare, or goad, or oxen, and yet you say: ‘I too plow and sow, and, having plowed and sown, I eat’.”*

Then, the Brahmin Kasībhāradvajā addressed the Exalted One thus:

*“A farmer you claim to be, but we see none of your tillage. Being questioned about plowing, please answer us so that we may know your plowing.”*

The Buddha answered:

*“I am controlled in body, controlled in speech, temperate in food. With truthfulness, I cut away weeds. Absorption in the Highest<sup>228</sup> is the release of the oxen.*

*“Perseverance (virīya) is the beast of burden that carries me towards the bond-free state.<sup>229</sup> Without turning, it goes, and, having gone, it does not grieve.*

*“Thus is the tilling done — it bears the fruit of Deathlessness. Having done all tilling, one is free from sorrow.”*

Thereupon, the Brahmin Kasībhāradvajā, filling a large bowl with milk-rice, offered it to the Exalted One, saying:

*“May the Venerable Gotama eat the milk-rice! The Venerable Gotama is a farmer, since the Venerable Gotama tills a crop that bears the fruit of Deathlessness.”*

The Exalted One, however, refused to accept the milk-rice, saying:

<sup>227</sup> *Kasī* = “one who tills or plows, plowman,” from Pāli *kas-* (Sanskrit *kṛṣ-* or *karṣ-*) “to plow or till the land.” Thus, Kasībhāradvajā = “the plowman Bhāradvajā.”

<sup>228</sup> That is, Arahantship.

<sup>229</sup> That is, *nibbāna*.

*“What is obtained by reciting verses is not fit to be eaten by me. This, O Brahmin, is not the rule of sears. The Enlightened Ones reject such food. While this principle lasts, this is the livelihood.*

*“Serve the unique, cankerless, great sage of holy calm with other kind of food and drink, for He is like a field to him who desires to sow good deeds.”*

Thereupon, Kasībhāradvajā asked the *Buddha* to whom he should give the milk-rice. The *Buddha* replied that He did not see anyone in this world who could rightly digest this milk-rice, and He advised Kasībhāradvajā to throw it away. Kasībhāradvajā then dropped the milk-rice into water where there was no life. As soon as it was dropped into the water, it hissed, and boiled, and fumed, and steamed. Kasībhāradvajā was awestruck, and his hair stood on end as he watched what was happening. He immediately prostrated himself before the *Buddha* and said:

*“This is magnificent, Master Gotama! Just as if one might set upright what had been overturned, or reveal what had been hidden, or point out the way to one who had gone astray, or hold out a lamp in the dark so that those who have eyes might see, so, likewise, has the Truth been explained by Master Gotama in various ways. Therefore, I take refuge in Him, His Dhamma, and His Sangha. I wish to enter the homeless life and to receive the higher ordination from Master Gotama.”*

Then, Kasībhāradvajā received ordination, and, not long after, by leading a secluded life and striving diligently and energetically with a resolute will, Venerable Bhāradvajā became one of the *Arahants*.

### *12th Year at Verañjā*

A Brahmin from Verañjā, hearing that the *Buddha* was residing at Verañjā near Nāleru's Nimbu tree with a large company of His disciples, approached Him and raised several questions regarding His conduct, thus:

*“Master Gotama, I have heard that the Ascetic Gotama pays no homage to Brahmins who are old, aged, burdened with years, advanced in life and come to the last stage, that he does not rise up for them or invite them to sit down, and I find that this is actually so, too, for Master Gotama does not in fact do these things. That is not good, Master Gotama.”*

*“Brahmin, in this world, with its deities, its māras, and its divinities, in this generation, with its monks and Brahmins, with its princes and men, I see none to whom I should pay homage or rise up for or invite to sit down, for his head would burst open when a Perfect One paid homage to or rose up for or invited him to sit down.”*

*“Master Gotama is lacking in taste.”*



*“There is one way in which it could rightly be said that the Ascetic Gotama is lacking in taste — taste for visible forms, taste for sounds, odors, flavors, and objects of touch — these are rejected in a Perfect One ... and are no longer subject to future arising. But surely, Brahmin, you did not mean that?”*

*“Master Gotama has no sense of values.”*

*“There is a way in which it could rightly be said that the Ascetic Gotama has no sense of values — sense of value for visible forms, sense of value for sounds, odors, flavors, and objects of touch — these are rejected in a Perfect One ... and are no longer subject to future arising. But surely, Brahmin, you did not mean that?”*

*“Master Gotama teaches that there is nothing that ought to be done.”*

*“There is a way in which it could rightly be said that the Ascetic Gotama teaches that there is nothing that ought to be done — for I do teach that one ought not to do wrong bodily or verbal or mental acts and the many kinds of evil, unwholesome things. But surely, Brahmin, you did not mean that?”*

*“Master Gotama teaches nihilism.”*

*“There is a way in which it could rightly be said that the Ascetic Gotama teaches nihilism — for I do teach annihilation of lust and hatred and delusion and the many kinds of evil, unwholesome things. But surely, Brahmin, you did not mean that?”*

*“Master Gotama is fastidious.”*

*“There is a way in which it could rightly be said that the Ascetic Gotama is fastidious — for I am fastidious about wrong bodily, verbal, and mental acts and the many kinds of evil, unwholesome things. But surely, Brahmin, you did not mean that?”*

*“The Ascetic Gotama is one who leads away.”*

*“There is a way in which it could rightly be said that the Ascetic Gotama is one who leads away — for I teach the Dhamma that leads away from lust and hatred and delusion and from the many kinds of evil, unwholesome things. But surely, Brahmin, you did not mean that?”*

*“The Ascetic Gotama is a slayer.”*

*“There is a way in which it could rightly be said that the Ascetic Gotama is a slayer — for I say that wrong bodily, verbal, and mental acts are evil, unwholesome things that ought to be slain; and him I call a slayer in whom evil, unwholesome things that ought to be slain are slain, cut off at the root, made like palm stumps, done away with, and no more subject to future arising; and, in a Perfect One, these things are slain ... and no more subject to future arising. But surely, Brahmin, you did not mean that?”*

*“The Ascetic Gotama has missed his rebirth.”*

*“There is a way in which it could rightly be said that the Ascetic Gotama has missed his rebirth — when a person’s re-entry into a womb and his future coming to birth are rejected ... and no longer subject to future arising, then, I say of him that he has missed his rebirth; and, in the Perfect One, re-entry into a*

womb and future rebirth are rejected ... and no longer subject to future arising. But surely, Brahmin, you did not mean that?"

"Now suppose, Brahmin, that a hen had eight or ten or twelve eggs which she brooded over, incubated, and hatched with care; should the first one of these chicks to pierce the shell with the points of its claws and beak, the first one to come out safely, be called the eldest or the youngest?"

"It should be called the eldest, Master Gotama, for it is the eldest of them."

"So, too, Brahmin, in this generation given over to Ignorance, enclosed in a shell of Ignorance, sealed in by Ignorance, I alone in the world have discovered the supreme full Enlightenment by piercing the shell of Ignorance, of Unawareness. Thus, it is I who am the eldest and the foremost in the world."<sup>230</sup>

The Brahmin was so pleased with the *Buddha's* answers that he became a follower and invited the *Buddha* and His disciples to spend the rainy season at Verañjā. The *Buddha* signified His assent, as usual, by His silence.

Unfortunately, at this particular time, there was a famine in Verañjā, and the *Buddha* and His disciples were compelled to live on food intended for horses. A horse-dealer very kindly provided them with some coarse food that was available, and the *Buddha* partook of such food with perfect equanimity.

One day during this period, Venerable Sāriputta, arising from his solitary meditation, approached the *Buddha* and respectfully questioned him thus: "Which *Buddha's* Dispensation lasted long and which did not?"

The *Buddha* replied that the Dispensation of the Buddhas Vip̄asi, Sikhī, and Vessabhū did not endure long, while the Dispensation of the Buddhas Kakusandha, Konāgamana, and Kassapa endured long.<sup>231</sup>

The *Buddha* attributed this to the fact that some *Buddhas* did not make a great effort to preach the *Dhamma* in detail and did not promulgate disciplinary rules and regulations for their disciples, while other *Buddhas* did so.

Thereupon, Venerable Sāriputta respectfully implored the *Buddha* to promulgate the Fundamental Precepts (*Pātimokkha*<sup>232</sup>) for the future discipline of the *Sangha* so that the Holy life might endure long. To which the *Buddha* replied:

<sup>230</sup> *Vinaya Piṭaka*, Sutta Vibhanga, Pārājikā, The Foremost in the World. The rainy season at Verañjā forms the subject of the Introduction to the Pārājika. The Sutta Vibhanga enumerates the 227 disciplinary rules for monks. These rules are arranged into eight categories: (1) four rules leading to expulsion from the Order if broken: sexual intercourse, theft, taking a human life or inducing another to commit suicide, and falsely boasting of supernormal powers; (2) thirteen rules dealing with initial and subsequent meetings of the *Sangha*; (3) two indefinite rules; (4) thirty rules dealing with expiation and forfeiture; (5) ninety-two rules dealing with expiation; (6) four rules requiring confession; (7) seventy-five rules dealing with etiquette and decorum; and (8) seven rules for the settlement of legal processes.

<sup>231</sup> *Vinaya Piṭaka*, Sutta Vibhanga, Pārājikā.

<sup>232</sup> Sanskrit *Prātimokṣa*.

*“Be patient, Sāriputta, be patient. The Tathāgata alone is aware of the time for it. Until certain conditions arise in the Sangha, the Tathāgata will not promulgate Disciplinary Rules for the disciples and will not lay down the Fundamental Precepts. When such defiling conditions arise in the Sangha, then only will the Tathāgata promulgate Disciplinary Rules and lay down the Fundamental Precepts in order to eradicate such defilements.*

*“When, Sāriputta, the Sangha attains long standing, full development, great increase in gains, and greatness in erudition, defiling conditions will arise in the Sangha. Then will the Tathāgata promulgate Disciplinary Rules and lay down the Fundamental Precepts to prevent such defilements.*

*“Sāriputta, the Order of disciples is free from troubles, devoid of evil tendencies, free from stain, pure, and well established in virtue. The last of my five hundred disciples is a Sotāpanna,<sup>233</sup> not likely to fall, steadfast and destined for Enlightenment.”*

At the end of this rainy season, the *Buddha* went on a preaching tour to Soreyya, Saṅkassa, Kannakujja, Payāga, and, then, crossing the river, stayed some time in Benares and returned from there to Vesālī to reside at the Pinnacled Hall in Mahāvana.

#### *13th and 14th Years*

The 13th year was spent at Cāliya Rock, and the 14th year was spent at Jetavana Monastery in Sāvattthī. It was during the 14th year that Venerable Rāhula received his Higher Ordination, having completed his twentieth year.

#### *15th Year at Kapilavatthu*

The pathetic death of King Suppabuddha, who was angry with the *Buddha* for leaving his daughter, Yasodharā, occurred in this year.

It may be mentioned that the *Buddha* spent only one rainy season in His birthplace.

#### *16th Year at the City of Ālavī*

The conversion of Ālavaka the demon (*yakkha*), who feasted on human flesh, took place in this year.<sup>234</sup>

Ālavaka, a ferocious demon, was enraged to see the *Buddha* in his mansion. He came up to Him and asked Him to depart. “Very well, friend,” said the *Buddha* and went out. “Come in,” said Ālavaka, and the *Buddha* came in. For the second and third time,

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<sup>233</sup> The *Buddha* was referring to Venerable Ānanda.

<sup>234</sup> *Khuddaka Nikāya, Sutta Nipāta, Urugavagga, Ālavaka Sutta.*

he made the same request, and the *Buddha* complied. But, when he commanded Him for the fourth time, the *Buddha* refused and asked Ālavaka to do what he could.

*"Well, I will ask you a question," said Ālavaka.*

*"If you will not answer, I will scatter your thoughts, or tear out your heart, or take you by your feet and throw you across the Ganges."*

*"Nay, friend," replied the Buddha.*

*"I do not see in this world, inclusive of gods, brahmās, ascetics, and Brahmins, among the multitude of gods and men, any who could scatter my thoughts, or tear out my heart, or take me by my feet and throw me across the Ganges. However, friend, ask what you wish."*

Ālavaka then asked the following questions:

*"Herein, which is man's best possession?  
Which, when well practiced, yields happiness?  
Which, indeed, is the sweetest of tastes?  
How lived do they call the best life?"*

The *Buddha* answered these questions thus:

*"Herein, confidence is man's best possession.  
Dhamma well practiced yields happiness.  
Truth, indeed, is the sweetest of tastes.  
Life lived with understanding is the best, they say."*

Ālavaka next asked the *Buddha*:

*"How does one cross the flood?  
How does one cross the sea?  
How does one overcome sorrow?  
How is one purified?"*

The Exalted One replied:

*"By confidence, one crosses the flood.  
By heedfulness, one crosses the sea.  
By effort, one overcomes sorrow.  
By wisdom, one is purified."*

Ālavaka then inquired:

*"How is wisdom gained?"*

*How are riches found?  
How is renown gained?  
How are friends bound?  
Passing from this world to the next, how does one not grieve?"*

In answer, the *Buddha* said:

*"The heedful, intelligent person of confidence gains wisdom by hearing the Dhamma of the Pure Ones that leads to nibbāna.*

*"He who does what is proper, persevering and strenuous, gains wealth.*

*"By truth, one attains fame.*

*"Generosity binds friends.*

*"That faithful householder who possesses these four virtues — truthfulness, good morals, courage, and liberality — does not grieve after passing away."*

*"Go ahead and ask any other ascetic or Brahmin whether there is found anything greater than truthfulness, self-control, generosity, and patience."*

Understanding well the meaning of the *Buddha*'s words, Āḷavaka said:

*"How could I now ask other ascetics and Brahmins? Today, I know what is the secret of my future welfare.*

*"For my own good did the Buddha come to Āḷavā. Today, I know where gifts bestowed yield fruit in abundance. From village to village, from town to town, I will wander honoring the Fully Enlightened One and the perfection of the sublime Dhamma."*

*17th, 18th, 19th, and 20th Years*

The 17th year was spent at Rājagaha. The 18th year was spent at Cāliya Rock. The 19th and 20th years were spent at Rājagaha.

### **The Buddha and Angulimāla<sup>235</sup>**

It was in the 20th year of His ministry that the *Buddha* converted the notorious murderer Angulimāla. Ahimsaka<sup>236</sup> was his original name. His father was chaplain to the King of Kosala. He received his education at Taxila, the famous education center in olden days, and became the most illustrious and favorite pupil of his renowned teacher. Unfortunately, his colleagues grew jealous of him and, by concocting a false story,

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<sup>235</sup> See *Majjhima Nikāya*, Rājavagga, Angulimāla Sutta, no. 86.

<sup>236</sup> Ahimsaka "not harming others, harmless, humane."

succeeded in poisoning the teacher's mind against him. The enraged teacher, without any investigation, contrived to put an end to Angulimāla's life by ordering him to fetch a thousand human right-hand fingers as a teacher's honorarium. In obedience to his teacher, though with great reluctance, he made his way to the Jalini forest in Kosala and started killing people to collect fingers for the required offering. At first, the fingers he collected were hung on a tree, but they were destroyed by crows and vultures. Thereafter, he wore a garland of the fingers to keep track of the exact number. Hence, he was known by the name Angulimāla.<sup>237</sup> After he had collected 999 fingers, the *Buddha* appeared on the scene. Overjoyed at the sight of the *Buddha*, because he thought he could complete the required number by killing the great ascetic, he drew his sword and stalked the *Buddha*. However, the *Buddha* used His psychic powers to create obstacles on the way so that Angulimāla would not be able to get near Him even though the *Buddha* walked at His usual pace. Angulimāla ran as fast as he could, but he could not overtake the *Buddha*. Panting and sweating, he stopped and cried out: "Stop, ascetic!" To which the *Buddha* calmly replied: "Though I walk, yet have I stopped. You too, Angulimāla, stop." The murderer thought to himself: "These ascetics speak the truth, yet He says that He has stopped, whereas it is I who have stopped. What does He mean?" Standing still, he questioned the *Buddha*:

*"You who are walking, O Ascetic, has said: 'I have stopped!' And you tell me, who has stopped, to stop. I ask you, O Ascetic, what is the meaning of your words? How can you say that you have stopped, but I have not?"*

The *Buddha* gently replied:

*"Indeed, I have stopped, Angulimāla, forever more, having renounced violence towards all living things. Therefore, it is I who have stopped, but you continue on."*

At that point, Angulimāla's good *kamma* rushed up to the surface. He realized that this ascetic was none other than the Buddha Gotama, who, out of compassion, had come to help him. He immediately threw down his sword and armor and became a convert. Later, as requested by him, he was admitted into the Noble Order by the *Buddha* with the mere utterance "Come *Bhikkhu*!" (*Ehi Bhikkhu*).

News spread that Angulimāla had become a *Bhikkhu*. The King of Kosala, in particular, was greatly relieved to hear of his conversion, because he was a veritable source of danger to his subjects.

But Venerable Angulimāla had no peace of mind, because, even in his solitary meditation, he had memories of his past deeds and of the pathetic cries of his unfortunate

<sup>237</sup> Angulimāla "finger necklace," so-called because of the necklace of the fingers of his victims that he wore around his neck. For a detailed account of Angulimāla's life story, cf. Nyanaponika Thera and Hellmuth Hecker, *Great Disciples of the Buddha: Their Lives, Their Works, Their Legacy* (Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications [1997]), pp. 317—333.

victims. As a result of his evil *kamma*, while seeking alms in the streets, he would become a target for stray sticks and stones, and he would return to the monastery “with broken head and flowing blood, cut and crushed” to be reminded by the *Buddha* that he was merely reaping the effects of his own *kamma*.

One day, as he went on his round for alms, he saw a woman in labor. Moved by compassion, he reported the woman’s suffering to the *Buddha*. The *Buddha* then advised him to pronounce the following words of truth, which later came to be known as the “*Angulimāla paritta*”:

*“Sister, since my birth in the Ariya clan,<sup>238</sup> I know not that I have consciously destroyed the life of any living being. By this truth, may you be whole, and may your child be whole.”*

He studied this *paritta*<sup>239</sup> and, going to the presence of the suffering woman, sat on a seat separated from her by a screen, and uttered these words. Instantly, she delivered the child with ease. The efficacy of this *paritta* persists to this day.

In due course, Venerable Angulimāla attained Arahantship. Referring to his memorable conversion by the *Buddha*, he said:

*“Some creatures are subdued by force, some by the hook, and some by whips. But I was tamed by such a one who needed neither staff nor sword.”<sup>240</sup>*

## The Remaining Twenty-five Years

The *Buddha* spent the remaining twenty-five years of His life mostly in Sāvathī at the Jetavana Monastery built by Anāthapiṇḍika, the millionaire, and partly at Pubbārāma, built by Visākhā, the chief benefactress. ■

<sup>238</sup> That is, since his ordination.

<sup>239</sup> *Paritta* “protective discourse.” The practice of reciting or listening to *paritta suttas* began very early in the history of Buddhism. In the Pāli literature, these short verses are recommended by the *Buddha* as providing protection from certain afflictions. The belief in the effective power to heal, or protect, of the *saccakiriya*, or asseveration of something quite true, is an aspect of the work ascribed to the *paritta*. It is also widely believed that all-night recitations of *paritta* by monks bring safety, peace, and well-being to a community. Such recitations also occur on auspicious occasions, such as the inauguration of a new temple or home or to provide blessings upon those who hear them recited. Conversely, *paritta* discourses are recited on inauspicious occasions as well, such as at a funeral or on the death anniversary of a loved one.

<sup>240</sup> *Khuddaka Nikāya*, Pārāyaṇavagga, *Theragāthā*.



# 12

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## The Buddha's Daily Routine

*"The Lord is awakened. He teaches the Dhamma for awakening."*<sup>241</sup>

### Introduction

The *Buddha* can be considered the most energetic and the most active of all religious teachers who ever lived on earth. The whole day, He was occupied with His religious activities, except when He was attending to His physical needs. He was methodical and systematic in the performance of His daily duties. His inner life was one of meditation and was concerned with the experience of Nibbānic Bliss, while His outer life was one of selfless service for the moral upliftment of the world. Himself enlightened, He endeavored His best to enlighten others and liberate them from the ills of life.

His day was divided into five parts, namely, (1) the Forenoon Session, (2) the Afternoon Session, (3) the First Watch, (4) the Middle Watch, and (5) the Last Watch.

### The Forenoon Session

Usually, early in the morning, the *Buddha* surveyed the world with His Divine Eye to see whom He could help. If there were people who needed His spiritual assistance, He went to see them and helped them find the right path. In most cases, He went in search of the vicious and the impure, while the pure and virtuous came in search of Him. For instance, the *Buddha* went of His own accord to subdue the robber and murderer Angulimāla and the wicked demon Ālavaka, but pious young Visākhā, the generous millionaire Anāthapiṇḍika, and the intellectual Sāriputta and Moggallāna came to Him for spiritual guidance.

While rendering such spiritual service to whomever needed it, if He was not invited by a lay supporter to some particular place, He, before whom Kings prostrated themselves, would go in quest of alms through alleys and streets, with bowl in hand, either alone or with His disciples. Standing silently at the door of each house, without uttering a word, He accepted whatever food was placed in His bowl and then returned to

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<sup>241</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya.*

the monastery. Even in His eightieth year, when He was old and in indifferent health, He went on His rounds for alms in Vesālī.

Before midday, He finished His meals. Daily, just after eating, He would deliver a short discourse to the people, establish them in the Three Refuges (*ti-saraṇa*<sup>242</sup>) and the Five Precepts (*pañca-sīla*), and, if there were any among them who were spiritually advanced, show these particular individuals the Path to Sainthood. At times, He granted Ordination to them if they sought admission to the Order. Afterwards, He retired to His chamber.

### The Afternoon Session

After completing His forenoon activities, He would take a seat in the monastery, and the *Bhikkhus* would assemble around Him to listen to His exposition of the *Dhamma*. Some would approach Him to receive suitable subjects of meditation (*kammaṭṭhāna*), according to their temperaments; others would pay due respect to Him and then retire to their cells to spend the afternoon in contemplation.

After His discourse or exhortation to His disciples, He retired to His private Perfumed Chamber to rest. If He so desired, He would lie on His right side and rest for a while with mindfulness. On rising, He attained to the Ecstasy of Great Compassion (*mahā karuṇā samāpatti*) and surveyed the world with His Divine Eye, especially the *Bhikkhus* who had retired to solitude for meditation and other disciples in order to give them any spiritual advice that might have been needed. If those who were in need of spiritual advice happened to be at a distance, He would use His psychic powers to go there. He would then instruct them, after which He returned to His chamber.

Towards evening, the lay followers flocked to Him to hear the *Dhamma*. Perceiving their innate tendencies and temperaments with the *Buddha-Eye* (*Buddhacakkhu*),<sup>243</sup> He preached to them for about an hour. Each member of the audience, though differently constituted, thought that the *Buddha's* discourse was directed, in particular, at him — such was the *Buddha's* method of expounding the *Dhamma*. As a rule, the *Buddha* converted others by explaining His teachings with homely illustrations and parables, for He appealed more to the intellect than the emotions.

To the average person, the *Buddha* first spoke of generosity, morality, and heavenly bliss. To the more advanced, He spoke on the evils of material pleasures and on the blessings of renunciation. To the highly advanced, He expounded the Four Noble Truths.

<sup>242</sup> Sanskrit *tri-* “three,” *śaraṇa* “refuge, protection; place of shelter, refuge, or rest; home, house, abode, lair, asylum.”

<sup>243</sup> *Buddhacakkhu* constitutes the knowledge of one's inclinations and innate tendencies (*āsayānusaya-nāṇa*) and the knowledge of the dullness or keenness of faculties such as confidence (*saddhā*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*), energy (*virīya*), and wisdom (*paññā*).

On rare occasions, such as in the case of Angulimāla and Khemā, the *Buddha* resorted to the use of His psychic powers to bring about a change of heart in His listeners.

The sublime teachings of the *Buddha* appealed to both the masses and the intelligentsia alike. A Buddhist poet sings:

*Giving joy to the wise, promoting the intelligence of the middling, and dispelling the darkness of the dull-witted, this speech is for all people.*<sup>244</sup>

Both the rich and the poor, the high and the low, renounced their former faiths and embraced the new Message of Peace. The newborn *sāsana*,<sup>245</sup> which was inaugurated with a nucleus of five ascetics, soon developed into millions of followers and peacefully spread throughout Central India.

### The First Watch

This period extended from 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. and was exclusively reserved for instruction to *Bhikkhus*. During this time, the *Bhikkhus* were free to approach the *Buddha* and get their doubts cleared, question Him on the intricacies of the *Dhamma*, obtain suitable subjects of meditation, and hear the doctrine.

### The Middle Watch

During this period, which extended from 10:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m., Celestial Beings such as *devas* and *brahmās*, who are not visible to ordinary humans, approached the *Buddha* to question Him on the *Dhamma*. An often-recurring passage in the *suttas* is:

*“Now, when the night was far spent, a certain deva of unsurpassing splendor came to the Buddha, respectfully saluted Him, and stood at one side.”*

Several discourses and answers given to their queries appear in the *Samyutta Nikāya*.

### The Last Watch

The wee hours of the morning, extending from 2:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m., which make up the last watch, were divided into four parts.<sup>246</sup>

<sup>244</sup> *Satapañcasataka*, verse 78.

<sup>245</sup> The Buddhist religion, teachings, doctrines.

<sup>246</sup> According to the *Dharmapradipikā*, the last watch was divided into four parts. According to the Commentaries, however, the last watch consisted of three parts. During the third part, the *Buddha* attained the Ecstasy of Great Compassion.

The first part, extending from 2:00 a.m. to 3:00 a.m., was spent in pacing back and forth (*caṅkamana*). This served as a form of mild exercise for the *Buddha*. During the second part, extending from 3:00 a.m. to 4:00 a.m., He mindfully slept on His right side. During the third part, extending from 4:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m., He attained the state of Arahantship and experienced Nibbānic Bliss. Finally, during the fourth part, extending from 5:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m., He attained the Ecstasy of Great Compassion (*Mahā Karuṇā Samāpatti*) and radiated thoughts of loving-kindness towards all beings and softened their hearts. At this early hour, he surveyed the world with His *Buddha*-Eye to see whether He could be of service to anyone. The virtuous and those in need of His help appeared vividly before Him, though they might live at a remote distance. Out of compassion for them, He went to them of His own accord and rendered necessary spiritual assistance.



The whole day, the *Buddha* was fully occupied with His religious duties. Unlike any other living being, He slept only one hour at night. For two full hours, in the early morning and at dawn, He pervaded the whole world with thoughts of boundless love and brought happiness to millions. Leading a life of voluntary poverty, seeking His alms without inconveniencing anyone, wandering from place to place for eight months throughout the year preaching His sublime *Dhamma*, He tirelessly worked for the good and happiness of all till His eightieth year. ■

# 13

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## The Buddha's Parinibbāna<sup>247</sup>

*“The sun shines in the day; the moon shines in the night. The warrior shines in battle; the brāhmaṇa shines in meditation. But, day and night, the Buddha shines<sup>248</sup> in radiance of love for all.”<sup>249 250</sup>*

### Introduction

The *Buddha* was an extraordinary being. Nevertheless, He was mortal, subject to disease and decay, as are all beings. He was conscious of the fact that He would pass away in His eightieth year. Modest as He was, He decided to breathe His last breath not in renowned cities like Sāvattthī or Rājagaha, where His religious activities had been centered, but in the distant and insignificant hamlet of Kusinārā.

In His own words, the *Buddha*, in His eightieth year, was like “a worn-out cart.” Though old in age, yet, being strong in will, He preferred to traverse the long and arduous way on foot, accompanied by His trusted attendant, Venerable Ānanda. It may be mentioned that both Venerable Sāriputta and Venerable Moggallāna, His two chief disciples, had predeceased Him. So had Venerable Rāhula and Venerable Yasodharā.

### Conditions of Welfare

Rājagaha, the capital of Magadha, was the starting point of the *Buddha's* last journey.

Before His impending departure from Rājagaha, King Ajātasattu, who murdered his father, contemplating an unwarranted attack on the Vajjian Republic, sent his Prime

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<sup>247</sup> *Dīgha Nikāya*, Mahāvagga, Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, no. 16.

<sup>248</sup> The *Buddha* outshines immorality by the power of morality, vice by the power of virtue, ignorance by the power of wisdom, demerit by the power of merit, unrighteousness by the power of righteousness.

<sup>249</sup> The *Buddha* shines with five kinds of brilliance: (1) with the power of virtuous conduct, overcoming the power of vice; (2) with the power of goodness, overcoming the power of its absence; (3) with the power of true insight, overcoming the power of wrong views; (4) with the power of merit, overcoming its absence; and (5) with the power of *Dhamma*, overcoming the power of non-*Dhamma*.

<sup>250</sup> *Dhammapada*, XXVI, The Brāhmaṇa, verse 387.

Minister, Vassakāra, to the *Buddha* to ascertain the *Buddha's* views concerning this wicked plan.

The *Buddha* declared that (1) as long as the Vajjians meet frequently and hold many meetings; (2) as long as they meet together in unity, rise in unity, and perform their duties in unity; (3) as long as they enact nothing not enacted and act in accordance with the already-established ancient Vajjian principles; (4) as long as they support, respect, venerate, and honor the Vajjian elders and pay regard to their worthy speech; (5) as long as no women or girls of their families are detained by force or abduction; (6) as long as they support, respect, venerate, and honor those objects of worship — both internal and external — and do not neglect those righteous ceremonies held before; and (7) as long as the rightful protection, defense, and support for the *Arahants* shall be provided by the Vajjians so that *Arahants* who have not yet come may enter the realm and those who have entered the realm may live in peace, so long shall the Vajjians be expected not to decline but to prosper.

Hearing these seven conditions of welfare, which the *Buddha* himself taught the Vajjians, the Prime Minister, Vassakāra, took leave of the *Buddha*, fully convinced that the Vajjians could not be overcome by the King of Magadha in battle, without diplomacy or breaking up their alliance.

Thereupon, the *Buddha* availed Himself of this opportunity to teach seven similar conditions of welfare mainly for the benefit of His disciples. He summoned together all of the *Bhikkhus* of Rājagaha and said:

*“As long, O disciples, as the Bhikkhus assemble frequently and hold frequent meetings;*

*“As long as the Bhikkhus meet together in unity, rise in unity, and perform the duties of the Sangha in unity;*

*“As long as the Bhikkhus shall promulgate nothing that has not been promulgated, do not abolish what has been promulgated, and act in accordance with the already-established rules;*

*“As long as the Bhikkhus support, respect, venerate, and honor those long-ordained Theras of experience, the fathers and leaders of the Order, and respect their worthy speech;*

*“As long as the Bhikkhus do not fall under the influence of uprisen attachment that leads to repeated birth;*

*“As long as the Bhikkhus shall delight in forest retreats;*

*“As long as the Bhikkhus develop mindfulness within themselves so that disciplined co-celibates who have not yet come may do so and those who are already present may live in peace, so long shall the Bhikkhus be expected not to decline but to prosper.*

*“As long as these seven conditions of welfare shall continue to exist among the Bhikkhus, as long as the Bhikkhus are well-instructed in these conditions, so long shall they be expected not to decline but to prosper.”*

With boundless compassion, the *Buddha* enlightened the *Bhikkhus* on seven other conditions of welfare, as follows:

*“As long as the Bhikkhus shall not be fond of, nor delight in, nor engage in business;*

*“As long as the Bhikkhus shall not be fond of, nor delight in, nor engage in gossiping;*

*“As long as the Bhikkhus shall not be fond of, nor delight in, nor engage in sleeping;*

*“As long as the Bhikkhus shall not be fond of, nor delight in, nor engage in society;*

*“As long as the Bhikkhus shall neither have nor fall under the influence of base desires;*

*“As long as the Bhikkhus shall not have evil friends or associates;*

*“As long as the Bhikkhus shall not be prone to evil, so long shall the Bhikkhus not stop at mere lesser, special acquisition without attaining Arahantship.”*

Furthermore, the *Buddha* added that, as long as the *Bhikkhus* shall be devout, modest, conscientious, full of learning, persistently energetic, constantly mindful, and full of wisdom, so long shall the *Bhikkhus* be expected not to decline but to prosper.

### **Sāriputta's Praise**

After enlightening the *Bhikkhus* with several other discourses, the *Buddha*, accompanied by Venerable Ānanda, left Rājagaha and went to Ambalatt̥hika and, from there, to Nālandā, where He stayed at the Pāvārika Grove. On this occasion, Venerable Sāriputta approached the *Buddha* and praised the wisdom of the *Buddha*, saying:

*“Lord, so pleased am I with the Exalted One that I think there never was, nor will there ever be, nor is there now, any other ascetic or Brahmin who is greater and wiser than the Buddha as regards self-enlightenment.”*

The *Buddha*, who did not approve of such praise from His disciples, reminded Venerable Sāriputta that he had burst into such a song of praise without fully appreciating the merits of the *Buddhas* of the past and of the future.

Venerable Sāriputta acknowledged that he did not have first-hand knowledge of all the supremely Enlightened Ones but maintained that he was acquainted with the *Dhamma* lineage, the process through which one attains supreme Buddhahood, that is, (1)



by overcoming the five Hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*);<sup>251</sup> (2) by weakening the strong Passions (*kilesa*)<sup>252</sup> of the heart through Wisdom (*paññā*); (3) by thoroughly establishing the mind in the four kinds of Mindfulness (*sati*);<sup>253</sup> and (4) by rightly developing the seven Factors of Enlightenment (*bojjhanga*).<sup>254</sup>

### Pāṭaliputta

From Nālandā, the *Buddha* proceeded to Pāṭaligāma, where Sunīdha and Vassakāra, the chief ministers of Magadha, were building a fortress to repel the powerful Vajjians. Here, the *Buddha* resided in an empty house and, perceiving, with His supernormal vision, thousands of deities haunting the area, predicted that Pāṭaliputta<sup>255</sup> would become the chief city of the area — a trading center and a place for the exchange of all kinds of wares —, inasmuch as it was the residence for *Ariyas*. However, He cautioned that it would also be subject to three dangers arising from fire, water, and dissension.

Hearing of the *Buddha*'s arrival at Pāṭaligāma, Sunīdha and Vassakāra invited Him and His disciples for a meal on the following day. After the meal was over, when the *Buddha* had eaten and no longer had His bowl in hand, the ministers sat down at one side on lower seats. Thereupon, the *Buddha* exhorted them as follows:

*“Wheresoever a wise man shall make his abode, there, let him support the virtuous, who live self-controlled, and give the merit of his gifts to the deities who haunt the spot. Revered, they will revere him; honored, they will honor him again. They will be gracious to him as a mother is to her only child. And the man who has the grace of the gods will behold good fortune.”*<sup>256</sup>

The *Buddha* then left His seat and went away, but Sunīdha and Vassakāra followed Him. In honor of the *Buddha*'s visit to the city, the ministers desired to name the gate by which He left “Gotama-Gate.” They also desired to name the ferry by which

<sup>251</sup> Namely, (1) desire for gratification of the senses; (2) ill will; (3) sloth and torpor; (4) restlessness and worry; and (5) indecisiveness.

<sup>252</sup> There are ten Passions or Defilements, thus called because they are themselves defiled and because they defile the mental factors (*cetasika*) associated with them. They are: (1) greed (*lobha*); (2) hatred (*dosa*); (3) delusion (*moha*); (4) conceit (*māna*); (5) wrong views (*micchā-diṭṭhi* or simply *diṭṭhi*); (6) speculative doubt (*vicikicchā*); (7) mental torpor (*thīna*); (8) restlessness (*middha*); (9) shamelessness (*ahirika*); and (10) lack of moral dread or unconscientiousness (*anottappa*).

<sup>253</sup> That is, mindfulness (1) of the body; (2) of feelings; (3) of the mind; and (4) of mental objects.

<sup>254</sup> That is, (1) mindfulness; (2) investigation of the Truth (*Dhamma-vicaya*, that is, “seeking knowledge”, specifically, knowledge of the Four Noble Truths); (3) energy; (4) joy; (5) relaxation; (6) concentration; and (7) equanimity.

<sup>255</sup> The village of Pāṭaligāma was renamed Pāṭaliputta with the building of the new town. Today, this is the site of Patna. At a later date, it became famous as the capital of Asoka's empire, which had grown out of the kingdom of Magadha.

<sup>256</sup> *Dīgha Nikāya*, Mahāvagga, Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, no. 16.

He would cross the Ganges “Gotama-Ferry.” Thereafter, the gate by which the *Buddha* left was named “Gotama-Gate,” but, when the *Buddha* came to the Ganges, He crossed the overflowing river by His psychic powers, while the others were making preparations to cross by means of the ferry.

### Future States

After crossing the Ganges, the *Buddha* went to Koṭigāma and thence to the village of Nādikā, where He stayed at the Brick Hall. Thereupon, Venerable Ānanda approached the *Buddha* and respectfully questioned Him about the future states of several people who had died in that village. The *Buddha* patiently revealed the destinies of the persons concerned and then taught how to acquire the Mirror of Truth so that an *ariya* disciple, so endowed, may know of himself:

*“Destroyed for me is birth in a woeful state, animal realm, peta<sup>257</sup> realm, and sorrowful, evil, and low states. A Stream-Winner am I, not subject to fall, assured of final Enlightenment.”*

### The Mirror of the Dhamma (Dhammādāsa)

*“What, O Ānanda, is the Mirror of the Dhamma?”*

*“Herein, a noble disciple has absolute confidence in the Buddha, reflecting on His virtues thus:*

*“Thus, indeed, is the Exalted One, a Worthy One, a Fully Enlightened One, perfect in wisdom and conduct, an Accomplished One, Knower of the worlds, an Incomparable Charioteer for the training of mankind, the Teacher of gods and men, Omniscient, and Holy.*

*“He has absolute confidence in the Dhamma, reflecting on the characteristics of the Dhamma thus:*

*“Well-taught is the Dhamma by the Exalted One, to be self-realized, immediately effective, inviting investigation, leading onwards,<sup>258</sup> to be understood by the wise, each one for himself.*

<sup>257</sup> Sanskrit *preta* “hungry ghost.” The entire universe is made up of three spheres of existence: (1) the sensory sphere (*kāma-loka*); (2) the fine-material sphere (*rūpa-loka*); and (3) the immaterial sphere (*arūpa-loka*). The sensory sphere includes the hells (*niraya*), the demon realm (*asura-nikāya*), the realm of hungry ghosts (*peta-loka*), the animal kingdom (*tiracchāna-yoni*), the human realm (*manussa-loka*), and the six lower celestial realms (*deva-loka*). In the fine-material sphere (*rūpa-loka*), the faculties of seeing and hearing still exist. In the immaterial sphere (*arūpa-loka*), there is no corporeality whatsoever — only the four mental groups exist there. Cf. Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines* (4th revised edition; Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society [1980]), pp. 106—107.

<sup>258</sup> That is, leading to *nibbāna*.

*“He has absolute confidence in the Sangha, reflecting on the virtues of the Sangha thus:*

*“Of good conduct is the Order of the disciples of the Exalted One; of upright conduct is the Order of the disciples of the Exalted One; of wise conduct is the Order of the disciples of the Exalted One. These four pairs of persons constitute eight individuals.<sup>259</sup> The Order of the disciples of the Exalted One is worthy of gifts, of hospitality, of offerings, and of reverence and is an incomparable field of merit to the world.*

*“He becomes endowed with virtuous conduct pleasing to the Noble Ones, unbroken, intact, unspotted, unblemished, free, praised by the wise, untarnished by desires, conducive to concentration.”*

From Nādikā, the *Buddha* went to the flourishing city of Vesālī and stayed in the mango grove of the beautiful courtesan Ambapālī. Anticipating her visit, the *Buddha* advised His disciples to be mindful and reflective and taught them the way of mindfulness so that they would not be distracted by Ambapālī’s charms.

### **Ambapālī**

Ambapālī heard that the *Buddha* had come to Vesālī and was staying in her mango (*amba*) grove. She had a number of carriages made ready. She climbed into one of the coaches and drove out of Vesālī towards her mango grove, going as far along the way as was passable for carriages. She then got out of the coach and went the rest of the way on foot to where the Blessed One was staying. Upon her arrival, she paid homage to Him and then sat down at one side. After she was seated, the *Buddha* instructed, roused, and encouraged her with a discourse on the *Dhamma*. Thereupon, Ambapālī respectfully invited the Blessed One and His disciples for a meal on the following day. The *Buddha* accepted her invitation in preference to the invitation of the Licchavi Nobles, which He had received after Ambapālī’s invitation. Although the Licchavi Nobles offered her a large sum of money to obtain the opportunity to provide this meal for the *Buddha* and His disciples, she refused their offer. As invited, the *Buddha* and His disciples had their meal at Ambapālī’s residence. After the meal, Ambapālī very generously offered her spacious mango grove to the *Buddha* and His disciples.<sup>260</sup>

After the Blessed One had stayed in Ambapālī’s grove for as long as He chose, He said to Venerable Ānanda: “Come, Ānanda, let us go to Beluvagāma.” Thereupon, the *Buddha* traveled to Beluvagāma with a large company of *Bhikkhus*. It was at Beluvagāma, a village near Vesālī, that He spent His last and forty-fifth Retreat.

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<sup>259</sup> The “four pairs of persons constitute eight individuals” refers to one who has attained the Path and one who has attained its fruition in the case of each of the four stages of Sainthood.

<sup>260</sup> Later, Ambapālī entered the Order and attained Arahantship.

## The Buddha's Illness

After taking up residence for the rains at Beluvagāma, the *Buddha* suffered from a severe illness, and “sharp pains came upon Him even unto death.” With His iron will, the *Buddha* bore these pains without any complaint.

The *Buddha* was now conscious that He would soon pass away. But He thought that it would not be proper to pass away without addressing His attendant disciples and giving instructions to the Order. Therefore, He decided to subdue His illness by means of His will and live by constantly experiencing the bliss of Arahantship.

Immediately after His recovery, the *Buddha* was approached by Venerable Ānanda, who, expressing his pleasure at the *Buddha*'s recovery, remarked that he took some small comfort from the thought that the *Buddha* would not pass away without giving instructions to the Order.

*“I have been accustomed to seeing the Blessed One in comfort and in health, Lord. Indeed, with the Blessed One's illness, I felt as if my own body were quite rigid, I could not see straight, and my ideas were all unclear. However, Lord, I comforted myself knowing that the Blessed One would not attain final nibbāna without giving instructions to the Sangha.”*

## The Buddha's Exhortation

*“What, O Ānanda, does the Order of disciples expect of me? I have taught the Dhamma, making no distinction between esoteric and exoteric doctrine.<sup>261</sup> Concerning the truths, the Tathāgata has no closed fist. It may occur to someone: ‘It is I who will lead the Order of Bhikkhus,’ or ‘The Order of Bhikkhus is dependent upon me,’ or ‘It is he who should instruct any matter having to do with the Bhikkhus.’*

*“Since, Ānanda, the Tathāgata, Himself, does not think that it is He who should lead the Order of Bhikkhus or that the Order is dependent on Him, why, then, should the Tathāgata leave instructions concerning any matter having to do with the Order?*

*“I, too, Ānanda, am now decrepit, aged, old, advanced in years, and have reached my end. I am in my eightieth year. Just as a worn-out cart is made to move with the aid of straps, even so the body of the Tathāgata is moved with the*

<sup>261</sup> These two terms refer to both individuals and teachings. “This much of my doctrine will I not teach others” — such a thought means limiting the *Dhamma* to an inner circle. “This much of my doctrine will I teach others” — such a thought means barring the *Dhamma* to others. “To this person I shall teach” — such a thought means limiting the *Dhamma* to a single person. “To this person I shall not teach” — such a thought means excluding a particular individual. The *Buddha* made no distinction with regard to both His Teaching and His disciples. The *Buddha* had nothing hidden in His Teachings. Nor did He have an inner circle or an outer circle among His disciples.

*aid of straps. Whenever, Ānanda, the Tathāgata lives plunged in signless mental one-pointedness, by the cessation of certain feelings and unmindful of all objects, then only is the body of the Tathāgata at ease.*<sup>262</sup>

*“Therefore, Ānanda, be islands unto yourselves. Be a refuge unto yourselves — do not seek external refuge. Live with the Dhamma as your island, the Dhamma as your refuge. Do not depend on external refuge.*

*“How, Ānanda, does a Bhikkhu live as an island unto himself, as a refuge unto himself, with the Dhamma as an island, with the Dhamma as a refuge, seeking no external refuge?*

*“Here, Ānanda, a Bhikkhu lives strenuous, reflective, watchful, abandoning covetousness in this world, constantly developing mindfulness with respect to body, feelings, consciousness, and dhamma.*<sup>263</sup>

*“Whosoever shall live, either now or after my death, as an island unto oneself, as a refuge unto oneself, seeking no external refuge, with the Dhamma as an island, with the Dhamma as a refuge, seeking no external refuge, those Bhikkhus shall be foremost among those who are intent upon discipline.”*

Here, the *Buddha* lays special emphasis on the importance of individual striving for purification and deliverance from the ills of life. There is no efficacy in praying to others or in depending on others. One might question why Buddhists should seek refuge in the *Buddha*, the *Dhamma*, and the *Sangha* when the *Buddha* had explicitly advised His followers not to seek refuge in others. In seeking refuge in the Triple Gem,<sup>264</sup> Buddhists are merely paying homage to the *Buddha* as an instructor who has shown the Path of Deliverance, to the *Dhamma* as the only path, way, or means to Deliverance, and to the *Sangha* as living examples of the way life is to be lived. By merely seeking refuge in them, Buddhists do not consider that they will gain their Deliverance.

Though old and feeble, the *Buddha* not only availed Himself of every opportunity to instruct the *Bhikkhus* in various ways but also regularly went on His rounds for alms with bowl in hand when there were no private invitations. One day as usual, He went in quest of alms in Vesālī and, after His meal, went with Venerable Ānanda to the Capala Cetiya and, speaking of the delightfulness of Vesālī and other shrines in the city, addressed Venerable Ānanda thus:

*“Whosoever has cultivated, developed, mastered, made a basis of, experienced, practiced, thoroughly acquired the four Means of Accomplishment (iddhipāda),*<sup>265</sup>

<sup>262</sup> This refers to the bliss of Arahantship.

<sup>263</sup> These are the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*). Here, the term *dhamma* is used in a different sense and cannot adequately be rendered by any single English word — it refers to both mental and physical objects.

<sup>264</sup> That is, the *Buddha*, the *Dhamma*, and the *Sangha* — also called the “Three Jewels.”

<sup>265</sup> The four Means of Accomplishment are: (1) concentration of intention (*chanda*), accompanied by effort of will (*padhāna-saṁkhāra-samannāgata*); (2) concentration of energy (*virīya*); (3) concentration of consciousness (*citta*); and (4) concentration of investigation (*vimaṁsā*), accompanied by effort of will.

could, if he so desires, live for an eon (*kappa*)<sup>266</sup> or even a little longer (*kappāvasesam*). The Tathāgata, O Ānanda, has cultivated, developed, mastered, made a basis of, experienced, practiced, thoroughly acquired the four Means of Accomplishment. If He so desires, the Tathāgata could remain for an eon or even a little longer.”

The text adds that:

*Even though a suggestion so evident and so clear was thus given by the Exalted One, Venerable Ānanda was incapable of comprehending it so as to beseech the Buddha to remain for an eon for the good, benefit, and happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, benefit, and happiness of gods and men.*

The *sutta* attributes the reason to the fact that the mind of Venerable Ānanda was, at the moment, dominated by Māra, the Evil One.<sup>267</sup>

### The Buddha Announces His Death

The *Buddha* appeared on earth to teach the seekers of Truth things as they truly are and a unique Path for the Deliverance of all ills of life. During His long and successful ministry, He fulfilled His noble mission to the satisfaction of both Himself and His followers. In His eightieth year, He felt that His work was over. He had given all necessary instructions to His earnest followers — both the householders and the homeless ones —, and they were not only firmly established in His Teachings but were also capable of expounding them to others. Hence, He decided not to control the remainder of His life-span by His will-power and by experiencing the bliss of Arahantship. While residing at the Capala Cetiya, the *Buddha* announced to Venerable Ānanda that He would pass away in three months' time. Thereupon, Venerable Ānanda recalled what the *Buddha* had said earlier and begged Him to live for an eon (*kappa*) for the good, benefit, and happiness of all. The *Buddha* replied:

*“Enough, Ānanda, do not beseech the Tathāgata. The time for making such a request is now past.”*

<sup>266</sup> Here the term *kappa* (Sanskrit *kalpa*) means the normal human life-span, which was about 100 years. *Kappāvasesam* means an extra fraction of a *kappa* — about 120 years or so.

<sup>267</sup> As pointed out by John Snelling (*The Buddhist Handbook* [Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions (1991)], p. 32): “This is certainly an apocryphal touch and does poor justice to Ānanda, whom the Buddha himself praised as being exemplary in his devotion: ‘Your acts of love and kindness have been invariable and are beyond measure’.”



The *Buddha* then spoke on the fleeting nature of life and went with Venerable Ānanda to the Pinnacled Hall at Mahāvana and requested him to assemble all the *Bhikkhus* in the neighborhood of Vesālī.

After the *Bhikkhus* had been assembled, the *Buddha* spoke to them as follows:

*“Whatever truths have been expounded to you by me, study them well; practice, cultivate, and develop them so that this Holy Life may last long and be perpetuated out of compassion for the world, for the good and happiness of the many, for the good and happiness of gods and men.*

*“What are those truths? They are: The Four Foundations of Mindfulness; the Four Kinds of Right Endeavor; the Four Means of Accomplishment; the Five Faculties; the Five Powers; the Seven Factors of Enlightenment; and the Noble Eightfold Path.”*<sup>268</sup>

The *Buddha* then gave the following exhortation and publicly announced the time of His death to the *Sangha*:

*“Behold, O Bhikkhus, transient are all conditioned things. Strive on with diligence. The passing away of the Tathāgata will take place before long. At the end of three months from now, the Tathāgata will pass away.*

*“Ripe is my age. Short is my life. Leaving you, I shall depart. I have made myself my refuge. O Bhikkhus, be diligent, mindful, and virtuous. With well-directed thoughts, guard your mind. He who lives heedfully in this Dispensation will escape life’s wandering and put an end to suffering.”*

Casting His glance at Vesālī, the *Buddha* went with Venerable Ānanda to Bhaṇḍagāma, and, addressing the *Bhikkhus*, said:

*“Morality, concentration, wisdom, and deliverance supreme — these things were realized by the renowned Gotama.*

*“Comprehending them, the Buddha taught the doctrine to His disciples.*

*“The Teacher is He whose vision has put an end to sorrow and has extinguished all passions.”*

### **The Four Great References**

Passing thence from village to village, the *Buddha* arrived at Bhoganagara and there taught the Four Great Citations or References (*mahāpadesa*) by means of which the word of the *Buddha* could be tested and clarified:

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<sup>268</sup> These are the thirty-seven Requisites of Enlightenment (*bodhipakkhiya-dhammā*).



(1) *"A Bhikkhu may say thus: 'From the mouth of the Buddha Himself have I heard, have I received, thus: "This is the Doctrine, this is the Discipline, this is the Teaching of the Master".' His words should neither be accepted nor rejected. Without either accepting or rejecting such words, study every word and every expression and then put them beside the Discourses and compare them with the Disciplinary Rules. If, when so compared, they do not agree with the Discourses and do not agree with the Disciplinary Rules, then, you may come to the conclusion: 'Certainly, this is not the word of the Exalted One, this has been wrongly grasped by the Bhikkhu.' Therefore, you should reject it.*

*"If, when compared and contrasted, such words agree with the Discourses and Disciplinary Rules, you should come to the conclusion: 'Certainly, this is the word of the Exalted One, this has been correctly grasped by the Bhikkhu.'*

*"Let this be regarded as the First Great Reference.*

(2) *"Again, a Bhikkhu may say thus: 'In such and such monastery lives the Sangha together with leading Elders. From the mouth of that Sangha, have I heard, have I received, thus: "This is the Doctrine, this is the Discipline, this is the Teaching of the Master".' His words should neither be accepted nor rejected. Without either accepting or rejecting such words, study every word and every expression and then put them beside the Discourses and compare them with the Disciplinary Rules. If, when so compared, they do not agree with the Discourses and do not agree with the Disciplinary Rules, then, you may come to the conclusion: 'Certainly, this is not the word of the Exalted One, this has been wrongly grasped by the Bhikkhu.' Therefore, you should reject it.*

*"If, when compared and contrasted, such words agree with the Discourses and Disciplinary Rules, you should come to the conclusion: 'Certainly, this is the word of the Exalted One, this has been correctly grasped by the Bhikkhu.'*

*"Let this be regarded as the Second Great Reference.*

(3) *"Again, a Bhikkhu may say thus: 'In such and such monastery live many Elders and Bhikkhus of great learning, versed in the Teachings, proficient in the Doctrine, Disciplinary Rules, and Higher Learning. From the mouth of these Elders have I heard, have I received, thus: "This is the Doctrine, this is the Discipline, this is the Teaching of the Master".' His words should neither be accepted nor rejected. Without either accepting or rejecting such words, study every word and every expression and then put them beside the Discourses and compare them with the Disciplinary Rules. If, when so compared, they do not agree with the Discourses and do not agree with the Disciplinary Rules, then, you may come to the conclusion: 'Certainly, this is not the word of the Exalted One, this has been wrongly grasped by the Bhikkhu.' Therefore, you should reject it.*

*"If, when compared and contrasted, such words agree with the Discourses and Disciplinary Rules, you should come to the conclusion: 'Certainly, this is the word of the Exalted One, this has been correctly grasped by the Bhikkhu.'*

*“Let this be regarded as the Third Great Reference.*

(4) *“Again, a Bhikkhu may say thus: ‘In such and such monastery lives an elderly Bhikkhu of great learning, versed in the Teachings, proficient in the Dhamma, Disciplinary Rules, and Higher Learning. From the mouth of that Elder, have I heard, have I received, thus: ‘This is the Doctrine, this is the Discipline, this is the Teaching of the Master’.’ His words should neither be accepted nor rejected. Without either accepting or rejecting such words, study every word and every expression and then put them beside the Discourses and compare them with the Disciplinary Rules. If, when so compared, they do not agree with the Discourses and do not agree with the Disciplinary Rules, then, you may come to the conclusion: ‘Certainly, this is not the word of the Exalted One, this has been wrongly grasped by the Bhikkhu.’ Therefore, you should reject it.*

*“If, when compared and contrasted, such words agree with the Discourses and Disciplinary Rules, you should come to the conclusion: ‘Certainly, this is the word of the Exalted One, this has been correctly grasped by the Bhikkhu.’*

*“Let this be regarded as the Fourth Great Reference.*

*“These, Bhikkhus, are the Four Great References.”*

### **The Buddha’s Last Meal**

Enlightening His disciples with such edifying discourses, the *Buddha* proceeded to Pāvā, where He and His disciples were hosted by Cunda, the smith. With great fervor, Cunda prepared a special, delicious dish called *sūkaramaddava*.<sup>269</sup> As advised by the *Buddha*, Cunda served only the *Buddha* with *sūkaramaddava* and buried the remainder in the ground.

After the meal, the *Buddha* suffered from an attack of dysentery, and sharp pains came upon Him. He bore them calmly, without any complaint.

Though extremely weak and severely ill, the *Buddha* decided to walk to Kusinārā, His last resting-place, a distance of some six miles from Pāvā.<sup>270</sup> In the course of His last journey, it is stated that the *Buddha* had to sit down in about twenty-five places owing to His weakness and illness.

Along the way, He sat at the foot of a tree and asked Venerable Ānanda to fetch some water inasmuch as He was feeling thirsty. With difficulty, Venerable Ānanda

<sup>269</sup> Literally, “pig’s delight.” According to the Commentary, this dish consists of flesh of a boar neither too young nor too old, but not killed for the *Buddha*’s sake. According to others, however, it is a kind of mushroom or truffles. It has also been claimed to be a special kind of dish by that name or a nutritious food, or delicacy (*rasāyana*), with hallucinogenic or medicinal properties. What is quite clear is that the ancient commentators did not know for certain what the term *sūkaramaddava* meant.

<sup>270</sup> According to the Commentary, the *Buddha* chose Kusinārā to pass away for three reasons: (1) to preach the Mahāsudassana Sutta in order to inspire people to be more virtuous; (2) to convert Subhadda, His last disciple, who could not have been converted by anyone other than the *Buddha* Himself; and (3) to enable Doṇa, a Brahmin, to distribute His relics among His followers.

secured some fresh water from a streamlet which, only a few minutes earlier, had been flowing foul and turbid, stirred up by the wheels of five hundred carts.

At that time, a man named Pukkusa — a disciple of Āḷāra Kālāma — approached the *Buddha* and expressed his admiration at the serenity of the *Buddha*. Thereupon, the *Buddha* delivered a discourse on His imperturbability, after which Pukkusa offered Him a pair of golden robes. As directed by the *Buddha*, Pukkusa presented one of the robes to the *Buddha* and the other to Venerable Ānanda.

After Pukkusa had left, Venerable Ānanda placed the pair of robes on the *Buddha* and, to his astonishment, found the skin of the *Buddha* to be exceedingly bright, at which he said:

*“How wonderful a thing it is, Lord, and how marvelous, that the color of the skin of the Exalted One should be so clear, so exceedingly bright. For, when I placed even this pair of robes of burnished gold and ready for wear on the body of the Exalted One, it seemed as if they had lost their splendor.”*

Thereupon, the *Buddha* explained that, on two occasions, the color of the skin of the *Tathāgata* becomes clear and exceedingly bright, namely, on the night when the *Tathāgata* attains Buddhahood and on the night when the *Tathāgata* passes away.

The *Buddha* then announced that, on the third watch of the night on that day, He would pass away in the Sāla Grove of the Mallians between the twin *sāla* trees, in the vicinity of Kusinārā.

### **Cunda's Meritorious Meal**

The *Buddha* took His last bath in the river Kukutthā and, resting for a while, spoke thus:

*“Now, it may happen Ānanda, that someone may stir up resentment towards Cunda the smith, saying: ‘This is evil to you, Cunda, and a loss to you that, when the Tathāgata had eaten His last meal from food prepared by you, then He died.’ Any such resentment towards Cunda the smith should be checked by saying: ‘This is good to you, Cunda, and a gain to you that, when the Tathāgata had eaten His last meal from food prepared by you, then He died.’ From the very mouth of the Exalted One, Cunda, have I heard, from His very mouth have I received this saying: ‘These two offerings of food are of equal fruit and of equal profit and of much greater fruit and of much greater profit than any other. And, what are the two? The offering of food which, when a Tathāgata has eaten, He attains to supreme and perfect insight, and the offering of food which, when a Tathāgata has eaten, He passes away to that utter cessation in which nothing whatever remains behind — these two offerings of food are of equal fruit and of equal profit and of much greater fruit and of much greater profit than any other.”*

*There has been laid up by Cunda the smith a kamma redounding to length of life, redounding to good birth, redounding to good fortune, redounding to good fame, redounding to the inheritance of heaven and of sovereign power.’ In this way, Ānanda, should be checked any resentment towards Cunda the smith.”*

The *Buddha* then proclaimed:

*“When a man gives, his merit will increase;  
No enmity can grow in those who are restrained.  
Those who are skilled shun evil; they attain nibbāna  
By ending greed, hatred, and delusion.”*

After uttering these words of consolation, out of compassion to the generous donor of His last meal, the *Buddha* went to the Sāla Grove of the Mallians and asked Venerable Ānanda to prepare a couch with the head toward the north between the twin *sāla* trees. The *Buddha* then laid Himself down on His right side, with one leg resting on the other, mindful and self-possessed.

### How the Buddha is Honored

Seeing the *sāla* trees blooming with flowers out of season, and other outward demonstrations of piety, the *Buddha* exhorted His disciples thus:

*“This is not the way, Ānanda, that the Tathāgata is respected, revered, venerated, honored, and revered. Whatever Bhikkhu or Bhikkhunī, Upāsaka or Upāsikā<sup>271</sup> lives in accordance with the Teaching, conducts himself dutifully, and acts righteously, it is he who respects, reverences, venerates, honors, and reveres the Tathāgata with the highest homage. Therefore, Ānanda, you should train yourselves thus: ‘Let us live in accordance with the Teaching, conducting ourselves dutifully, and acting righteously’.”*

At this moment, Venerable Upavāna, who had once been an attendant of the *Buddha*, was standing in front of the *Buddha* fanning Him. The *Buddha* asked him to stand aside. Venerable Ānanda wished to know why Upavāna was asked to stand aside,

<sup>271</sup> *Upāsaka* and *Upāsikā* are male and female lay followers respectively. These terms refer to any lay follower who is filled with faith and who has taken refuge in the *Buddha*, the *Dhamma*, and the *Sangha*. Their virtue is considered pure if they observe the Five Precepts (*pañca-sīla*): (1) abstaining from taking life; (2) from taking what is not freely given; (3) from sexual misconduct; (4) from false speech; and (5) from intoxicating drinks and drugs causing heedlessness. They should also avoid the following kinds of wrong livelihood: (1) trading in arms; (2) in living beings; (3) in meat; (4) in alcohol; and (5) in poison. Cf. Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines* (4th revised edition; Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society [1980]), p. 218.

inasmuch as he was very serviceable to the *Buddha*. The *Buddha* replied that *devas* had assembled in large numbers to see the *Tathāgata*, and they were displeased because Upavāna was standing in their way concealing Him.

### The Four Sacred Places

The *Buddha* then spoke of four places, made sacred by His association, which faithful followers should visit with reverence and awe — they are:

1. The birthplace of the *Buddha*;<sup>272</sup>
2. The place where the *Buddha* attained Enlightenment;<sup>273</sup>
3. The place where the *Buddha* established the incomparable Wheel of Truth (*Dhammacakka*);<sup>274</sup>
4. The place where the *Buddha* attained *parinibbāna*.<sup>275</sup>

And the *Buddha* added:

*“And they who die with a believing heart, in the course of their journey, will be reborn, on the dissolution of their body, after death, in a heavenly state.”*

### Conversion of Subhadda

At that time, a wandering ascetic named Subhadda<sup>276</sup> was living at Kusinārā. He had heard the news that the Ascetic Gotama would attain *parinibbāna* in the last watch of the night. And he thought:

*“I have heard mature and trustworthy teachers, their teachers, and the wandering ascetics say that seldom, and very seldom, indeed, do Exalted, Fully-Enlightened Arahants arise in this world. Tonight, in the last watch, the Ascetic Gotama will attain parinibbāna. A doubt has arisen in me, and I have confidence in the Ascetic Gotama. Capable, indeed, is the Ascetic Gotama to teach the doctrine so that I might dispel my doubt.”*

<sup>272</sup> Lumbinī, on the Indian borders of Nepal.

<sup>273</sup> Bodhgaya, about eight miles from the Gayā station.

<sup>274</sup> Sārnāth.

<sup>275</sup> Kusinārā (modern Kasiā), about thirty-two miles from Gotakhpur station.

<sup>276</sup> This Subhadda should be distinguished from another Subhadda who entered the Order in his old age. It was the latter who remarked that the death of the *Buddha* was not an occasion for sorrow since the *Bhikkhus* were free to do whatever they liked, without being bound by the injunctions of the Master. This remark by Subhadda prompted Venerable Kassapa to take immediate steps to hold a convocation to preserve the purity of the *Dhamma* and the *Vinaya*.

Thereupon, Subhadda, the wandering ascetic, went to the Upavatana Sāla Grove of the Mallians, where Venerable Ānanda was, and, approaching him, spoke as follows:

*“I have heard mature and trustworthy teachers, their teachers, and the wandering ascetics say that seldom, and very seldom, indeed, do Exalted, Fully-Enlightened Arahants arise in this world. Tonight, in the last watch, the Ascetic Gotama will attain parinibbāna. A doubt has arisen in me, and I have confidence in the Ascetic Gotama. Capable, indeed, is the Ascetic Gotama to teach the doctrine so that I might dispel my doubt. May I, O Ānanda, obtain a glimpse of the Ascetic Gotama?”*

Venerable Ānanda replied:

*“Enough, friend Subhadda, do not disturb the Accomplished One. The Exalted One is wearied.”*

For the second and third time, Subhadda repeated his request, and, for the second and third time, Venerable Ānanda replied in the same manner.

The *Buddha* heard the conversation between Venerable Ānanda and Subhadda and, addressing Ānanda, said:

*“Nay, Ānanda, do not prevent Subhadda. Let Subhadda, O Ānanda, behold the Accomplished One. Whatsoever Subhadda will ask of me, all that will be with the desire for knowledge and not to annoy me. And, whatever I shall say in answer, he will readily understand.”*

Thereupon, Venerable Ānanda introduced Subhadda to the *Buddha*. Subhadda exchanged friendly greetings with the *Buddha* and, sitting aside, said:

*“There are those ascetics and priests, O Gotama, who are leaders of companies and congregations, who are heads of sects and are well-known, renowned religious teachers, esteemed as good men by the multitudes, as, for instance, Pūraṇa Kassapa, Makkhali Gosāla, Ajita Kesakambalī, Pakudha Kaccāyana, Sañjaya Belaṭṭhiputta, Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta<sup>277</sup> — have they all, as they claim, thoroughly understood the Truth or not, or have some of them understood and some not?*

*“Let it be, O Subhadda! Do not trouble yourself as to whether all or some have realized it or not. I shall teach the Doctrine to you. Listen, and bear it well in mind. I shall speak.”*

*“So be it, Lord.”*

<sup>277</sup> They all flourished at the time of the *Buddha*. Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta, also known as Mahāvīra, was the founder of Jainism.



The *Buddha* then spoke as follows:

*“In whatever Dispensation the Noble Eightfold Path does not exist, neither is the First Samaṇa,<sup>278 279</sup> nor the Second,<sup>280</sup> nor the Third,<sup>281</sup> nor the Fourth<sup>282</sup> to be found therein. In whatever Dispensation, O Subhadda, the Noble Eightfold Path does exist, there is to be found the First Samaṇa, the Second Samaṇa, the Third Samaṇa, and the Fourth Samaṇa. In this Dispensation,<sup>283</sup> O Subhadda, there exists the Noble Eightfold Path.*

*“Here, indeed, are found the First Samaṇa, the Second Samaṇa, the Third Samaṇa, and the Fourth Samaṇa. The various other schools are empty of Samaṇas.<sup>284</sup> If, O Subhadda, the disciples live rightly, the world would not be void of Arahants.*

*“I was twenty-nine years old when I went forth as a seeker after what is good. Now, fifty-one years have passed since I entered the homeless life. Outside this fold, there is not a single ascetic who acts even partly in accordance with this realizable Doctrine.”*

Thereupon, Subhadda spoke to the *Buddha* as follows:

*“Excellent, Lord, excellent! It is as if, O Lord, a man were to set upright that which was overturned, or were to reveal that which was hidden, or were to point the way to one who has gone astray, or were to hold a lamp amidst the darkness, so that whoever has eyes may see, even so has the doctrine been expounded in various ways by the Exalted One.*

*“And I, Lord, seek refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. May I receive the Lesser and the Higher Ordination in the presence of the Exalted One.”*

<sup>278</sup> *Samaṇa* means “wanderer, recluse, ascetic.” It also refers to the Four Stages of Sainthood.

<sup>279</sup> The First *Samaṇa* is the *Sotapāṇṇa* “Stream-Winner,” the first stage of Sainthood.

<sup>280</sup> The Second *Samaṇa* is the *Sakadāgāmi* “Once-Returner,” the second stage of Sainthood.

<sup>281</sup> The Third *Samaṇa* is the *Anāgāmi* “Non-Returner,” the third stage of Sainthood.

<sup>282</sup> The Fourth *Samaṇa* is the *Arahant* “Worthy One,” who is the perfect Saint. This is the fourth and final stage of Sainthood.

<sup>283</sup> That is, the Dispensation (*sāsana*) of the *Buddha*. The Pāli term *sāsana* literally means “message.” It refers to the Dispensation of the *Buddha*, that is, the Buddhist religion; it also refers to the Teachings, the Doctrine (*Dhamma*). *Navanga-Buddha* (or *satthu-*)*sāsana* “the ninefold Dispensation of the *Buddha* (or the Master)” consists of: (1) the discourses (*sutta*); (2) mixed prose (*geyya*); (3) exegesis (*veyyākaraṇa*); (4) verses (*gāthā*); (5) solemn utterances (*udāna*); (6) sayings of the Blessed One (*itivuttaka*); (7) birth stories (*jataka*); (8) extraordinary things (*abbhutadhamma*); and (9) analysis (*vedalla*). This classification is often found in the *suttas*. According to the Commentaries, the *Vinaya Piṭaka* and the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* are also included in the ninefold division. It is a classification based upon literary styles, and not upon given texts or books. Cf. Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines* (4th revised edition; Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society [1980]), p. 193.

<sup>284</sup> That is to say, the other schools are empty of *Arahants*.



The *Buddha* replied:

*“Whoever, Subhadda, being already committed to the other doctrines, desires the Lesser<sup>285</sup> and the Higher Ordination,<sup>286</sup> remains on probation for four months.<sup>287</sup> At the end of four months, the Bhikkhus approving, he is ordained and raised to the status of Bhikkhu. Nevertheless, on understanding, I will make individual exceptions.”*

Then Subhadda said:

*“If, Lord, those already committed to other doctrines, who desire the Lesser and the Higher Ordination in this Dispensation, remain on probation for four months, I, too, will remain on probation, and, after a lapse of that period, the Bhikkhus approving, let me be received into the Order and raised to the status of a Bhikkhu.”*

Thereupon, the *Buddha* addressed Venerable Ānanda and said:

*“Then, Ānanda, you may ordain Subhadda.”*

To which, Ānanda replied:

*“So be it, Lord.”*

And Subhadda, the wandering ascetic, spoke to Venerable Ānanda as follows:

*“It is a gain to you, O Venerable Ānanda! It is indeed a great gain to you, for you have been anointed by the anointment of discipleship in the presence of the Exalted One by Himself.”*

Thereupon, Subhadda received the Lesser and the Higher Ordination in the presence of the *Buddha*. And, in no long time after his Higher Ordination, Venerable Subhadda, living alone, remote from men, strenuous, energetic, and resolute, realized, in this life itself, by his own intuitive knowledge, the consummation of that incomparable Life of Holiness, and lived abiding in that state for the sake of which sons of noble

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<sup>285</sup> The Lesser Ordination refers to ordination as a novice, which is done by donning a saffron-colored robe after having shaved one's hair and beard and taking the Three Refuges and Ten Precepts. The novice is called a *Sāmaṇera*. He has cut himself off from the world and its ways. Henceforth, even his parents are addressed as “lay disciples.”

<sup>286</sup> The Higher Ordination is bestowed only after the completion of the twentieth year of life. He who receives the Higher Ordination is a full member of the Order and is called a *Bhikkhu*. He is bound to observe the *Pātimokkha* Precepts. If he commits any of the major offences, which involves “defeat,” he is expelled from the order. If willing, however, he could remain as a *Sāmaṇera*.

<sup>287</sup> A probation is not demanded of the Buddhist aspirant to ordination.

families leave the householder's life for the homeless life. He perceived that rebirth was ended, completed was the Holy Life, that, after this life, there was none other. And so, Venerable Subhadda became one of the *Arahants*. He was the last personal convert of the *Buddha*.

### The Last Words to Ānanda

Venerable Ānanda desired to know what should be done with the body of the *Tathāgata* after His death. The *Buddha* answered:

*“Do not engage yourselves in honoring the remains of the Tathāgata. Be concerned about your own welfare.<sup>288</sup> Devote yourselves to your own welfare. Be heedful, be strenuous, and be intent on your own good. There are wise warriors, wise Brahmins, wise householders who are firm believers in the Tathāgata. They will do honor to the remains of the Tathāgata.”*

When the *Buddha* finished speaking, Venerable Ānanda went aside and stood weeping at the thought:

*“Alas, I am still a learner,<sup>289</sup> with work yet to do.<sup>290</sup> But my Master will soon pass away — He who was my sympathizer.”*

The *Buddha*, noticing his absence, summoned Venerable Ānanda to His presence and exhorted him thus:

*“Enough, O Ānanda! Do not grieve, do not weep. Have I not already told you that we have to separate and divide and sever ourselves from everything that is dear and pleasant to us.*

*“O Ānanda, you have done much merit. Soon be freed from Defilements.”*

The *Buddha* then paid a tribute to Venerable Ānanda, commenting on his salient virtues.

<sup>288</sup> That is, Arahantship.

<sup>289</sup> *Sekha* “a noble learner”; a *sekha* — a disciple in higher training, that is, one who pursues the three kinds of training (*sikkhā*) — is one of those seven kinds of noble disciples who have reached one of the four supramundane paths or the three lower fruitions, while the one possessed of the fourth fruition (*Arahatta-phala*) is called “one beyond training” (*asekha*, literally, “no more learner”). A worldling (*puthujjana*) is called “neither a noble learner nor perfected in learning” (*n’eva-sekha-nāsekha*). A worldling is any lay person, monk, or nun who is still under the influence or control of all ten fetters (*samyojana*) that bind one to the round of rebirths (*saṃsāra*). Cf. Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines* (4th revised edition; Kandy, Śri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society [1980]), pp. 172 and 198.

<sup>290</sup> At this point, Venerable Ānanda was still a *Sotāpanna*.

After admonishing Venerable Ānanda in various ways, the *Buddha* directed him to enter Kusinārā and inform the Mallians of the impending death of the *Tathāgata*. The Mallians were duly informed and came weeping with their wives, young men, and young women to pay their last respects to the *Tathāgata*.

### The Final Moments

Then, the Blessed One addressed Venerable Ānanda and said:

*“It may be, Ānanda, that you will say thus: ‘The Sublime Teaching is without the Teacher. There is no Teacher for us.’ Nay, Ānanda, you should not think this way. Whatever Doctrine and Discipline have been taught and promulgated by me, Ānanda, they will be your Teacher when I am gone.*

*“If willing, O Ānanda, the Sangha may abolish the lesser and minor rules after my death.”*

Instead of using the imperative form, the *Buddha* has used the subjunctive in this behest. Had it been His wish that the lesser and minor rules should be abolished, He could have used the imperative. According to the Commentary, the *Buddha* foresaw that Venerable Kassapa, presiding over the First Council, would, with the consent of the *Sangha*, not abolish any rules — hence, His use of the subjunctive.

Inasmuch as the *Buddha* did not clearly state what these lesser and minor rules were and inasmuch as the *Arahants* could not come to a decision about them, they preferred not to alter any of the rules but to retain all of them intact.

Again, the *Buddha* addressed the disciples and said:

*“If, O disciples, there be any doubt as to the Buddha, or the Doctrine, or the Order, or the Path, or the Method, question me now, and do not repent afterwards thinking: ‘We were face to face with the Teacher, yet, we were not able to question the Exalted One in His presence’.”*

When He spoke thus, the disciples were silent. For the second and third time, the *Buddha* addressed the disciples in the same way. And, for the second and third time, the disciples were silent. Then, the *Buddha* addressed the disciples and said:

*“Perhaps it is out of respect for the Teacher that you do not question me. Let a friend, O disciples, speak out on behalf of another.”*

Still, the disciples were silent.

Thereupon, Venerable Ānanda spoke to the *Buddha* as follows:

*“Wonderful, Lord! Marvelous, Lord! Thus am I pleased with the company of disciples. There is not a single disciple who entertains a doubt or perplexity with regard to the Buddha, or the Doctrine, or the Order, or the Path, or the Method.”*

To which, the *Buddha* replied:

*“You speak out of faith, Ānanda, regarding this matter. There is knowledge in the Tathāgata that, in this company of disciples, there is not a single disciple who entertains a doubt or perplexity with regard to the Buddha, the Doctrine, the Order, the Path, and the Method. Of these five hundred disciples, Ānanda, he who is the last is a Stream-Winner, not subject to fall but certain and destined for Enlightenment.”*<sup>291</sup>

Then, the *Buddha* addressed the disciples and gave His final exhortation:

*“Indeed, Bhikkhus, this do I declare: Subject to change are all compound things. Strive on with diligence.”*

These were the last words spoken by the Blessed One.

### **The Passing Away**

The *Buddha* attained to the First Absorption (*jhāna*). Emerging from it, He attained, in order, to the Second, Third, and Fourth Absorptions. Emerging from the Fourth Absorption, He attained to “The Realm of the Infinity of Space” (*ākāsānañcāyatana*). Emerging from it, He attained to “The Realm of the Infinity of Consciousness” (*viññāṇañcāyatana*). Emerging from it, He attained to “The Realm of Nothingness” (*ākiñcaṇṇāyatana*). Emerging from it, He attained to “The Realm of Neither Perception nor Non-perception” (*n’eva-saññā-nāssaññāyatana*). Emerging from it, He attained to “The Cessation of Perceptions and Sensations” (*saññāvedayita nirodha*).

Venerable Ānanda, who had not yet developed the Divine Eye, addressed Venerable Anuruddha and said:

*“O Venerable Anuruddha, the Exalted One has passed away.”*

To which, Venerable Anuruddha replied:

<sup>291</sup> The reference here is to Venerable Ānanda, who, encouraged by these words, attained Arahantship later, just before the opening session of the First Council held at Rājagaha three months after the *parinibbāna* of the *Buddha*.

*“Nay, Brother Ānanda, the Exalted One has not passed away but has attained to the Cessation of Perceptions and Sensations.”*

Then, the *Buddha*, emerging from “The Cessation of Perceptions and Sensations,” attained to “The Realm of Neither Perception nor Non-perception.” Emerging from it, He attained to “The Realm of Nothingness.” Emerging from it, He attained to “The Realm of the Infinity of Consciousness.” Emerging from it, He attained to “The Realm of the Infinity of Space.” Emerging from it, He attained to the Fourth Absorption. Emerging from it, He attained to the Third Absorption. Emerging from it, He attained to the Second Absorption. Emerging from it, He attained to the First Absorption. Emerging from it, He attained to the Second Absorption. Emerging from it, He attained to the Third Absorption. Emerging from it, He attained to the Fourth Absorption. Emerging from it, and immediately thereafter, the *Buddha* passed away.<sup>292</sup> ■

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<sup>292</sup> The death of the *Buddha* occurred in 543 BCE on a *Vesak* full moon day.